

A PIONEER STUDY OF A PRE-DISCIPLESHIP MODEL

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Abstract

This thesis grew out of a desire to make disciples of all nations and help the Christian community to deal with the realities and problems it faces in doing evangelism. At the heart of the problem is the failure of the contemporary church's evangelistic efforts to produce many disciples. The large amount of money, time, and energies put into many outreach programs have resulted in few becoming mature disciples of Christ. This thesis reports on a study that examined an alternative approach to evangelism called pre-discipleship. Pre-discipleship, in this thesis, is defined as a process of evangelism that engages a seeker in a study of the word of God to the point that he or she is able make a commitment, intellectually, emotionally, and volitionally, as to whether he or she will follow Jesus. The study sought to investigate the significance of pre-discipleship of seekers in Christian conversion and in making disciples and the soundness of a particular form of pre-discipleship, *7 Discoveries*, and to identify ways to improve this tool.

The thesis begins by introducing the factors in contemporary evangelism that contribute to converts not becoming strong disciples of Christ. Then the paper lays out the biblical and theological foundation for pre-discipleship and reveals that most of the New Testament believers in Christ had engaged in a pre-discipleship process before their conversion. Then the thesis reviews the literature on evangelism, conversion, discipleship, and adult education, noting the support for the philosophy of pre-discipleship and the soundness of the practice. Next, the thesis reviews a number of pilot studies on a pre-discipleship curriculum called *7 Discoveries*. Finally, the paper summarizes the conclusions drawn from the literature and pilot studies, laying a foundation for further studies in the biblical, theological, and practice of pre-discipleship.

Chapter One: The Need for an Evaluative Study of a Pre-Discipleship Model

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”¹ Since the days of the early church, Christians have encountered difficulties in meeting this challenge to share their faith and make disciples. The early church believers faced persecution and death, while many missionaries have dealt with hardships. In the past century, the church has engaged in many evangelistic and missionary efforts but it seems that these endeavors have had limited effectiveness in enabling new believers to become disciples (committed followers) of Christ.

My own journey in evangelism and discipleship started as a young teen at a Christian youth retreat where I was challenged with the command that Christians must share their faith. I began wearing “Jesus buttons” in high school and handed comic-style tracts out to my classmates. My thrill that year was leading a classmate in the prayer for salvation after going through The Four Spiritual Laws with him. By the time I was eighteen, I had engaged in door-to-door evangelism in two communities, sharing the gospel with whoever would listen. In spite of being an introvert, I witnessed for Jesus and he used me to lead hundreds to him through preaching, teaching, and personal witness.

Yet something troubled me. It seemed that only a few of those who had come to Christ through my ministry were continuing as disciples of Christ. Then I realized that many ministries had the same problem. Although they had spent much money, time, and energy on their efforts, the number of disciples produced seemed to be far fewer than the

¹Matt 28:19–20 NIV.

number of converts. This left me with many questions about the methods used to share the gospel of Jesus Christ and about how evangelism could be done so more converts become disciples.

Those questions led to an investigation of evangelism and discipleship, which eventually laid the ground for this thesis. This chapter summarizes the results of that investigation by first discussing key problems that prevent the church from effectively helping converts to become disciples. Then the chapter identifies an element that has been missing in current evangelism — a strategy that would engage Christians in a natural way with the postmodern community and enable them to become effective in making disciples. The chapter closes by introducing pre-discipleship and a tool for pre-discipleship called *7 Discoveries*.

I. Problems in Evangelism

In my experience, as Christians we have shown little creativity in our evangelistic efforts and have settled for using the same methods to relatively little effect. However, these are not the only problems associated with evangelism today. Others include a lack of concern for evangelism, lack of a positive image for evangelism, lack of a pure faith, lack of cultural relevance, and lack of disciples. This chapter will explore these problems because learning how to become more effective in making disciples out of converts begins with understanding what is causing churches to fail at it. Identifying the problems in evangelism will enable Christians to focus on the issues that need to be addressed and then to understand which solutions might be effective.

A. *Lack of Concern for Evangelism*

The lack of concern for doing effective evangelism in many North American churches arises from a number of factors, including confusion about the nature of evangelism, pluralism, and poor values. A misunderstanding of evangelism has influenced some Christians to think that they are witnessing simply by letting others know that they are Christians. The tolerant context in society makes some Christians uncomfortable with personally sharing the gospel with others lest they seem intrusive.

Richard Winter in commenting about people's boredom in a culture of entertainment writes, "When everything is allowed in the name of tolerance, then there is nothing worth standing for, and as a result the soul begins to wither and die. A sense of apathy and disengagement from life takes over. A feeling that everything is tedious and annoying underlies all thoughts."²

Many North American Christians have misplaced values and priorities that seem to have affected their attitudes toward evangelism. Most churchgoers are so busy with work, family, and social commitments that they do not have much time for God, ministry, and evangelism. Ron Hutchcraft writes, "And the busier we get, the more self-absorbed we are. We are so preoccupied with our responsibilities, our fatigue, and our unfinished work that we can't seem to fit anyone else in! When life overheats, children become intruders, co-workers are a nuisance, and every other driver is in the way."³

B. Lack of a Positive Image of Evangelism

The poor image of evangelism in society and in some churches may deter a number of Christians from engaging in outreach. Some Christians have been taught to be aggressive and even obnoxious when it comes to sharing the gospel, in the belief that the end would justify the means. Michael Simpson, a strategist on evangelism writes,

Evangelism as most people know it is an unnatural act. Christians knock on stranger's doors, interrupting their time with their family, stop random people in the street, divert vacationers' enjoyment, and flash Bible verses at sporting events. Others stand on street corners spouting the promise of eternal damnation at passersby with a white-knuckled grip on a well-worn Bible, which appears more as a weapon than a beacon of hope.⁴

Simpson compared the way some evangelicals do evangelism to annoying telemarketers pushing their product onto uninformed and unwilling strangers, robbing the unsuspecting victim of their time with interruptions. Simpson writes, "I don't think it is likely that

² Richard Winter, *Still Bored In A Culture of Entertainment: Rediscovering Passion and Wonder* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 92.

³ Ron Hutchcraft, *Living Peacefully in a Stressful World: A Strategy for Replacing Stress with Peace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House Publishers, 2000), 115.

⁴ Michael L. Simpson, *Permission Evangelism: When to Talk, When to Walk* (Paris, ON: NexGen, 2003), 15.

anyone in a westernized country will accept Christ after being randomly stopped on a busy street for a night on the town. I do, however personally know of hundreds of people that have been loved into salvation.”⁵

The image of evangelism has also been tarnished by the reduction of evangelism into a pre-packaged sales pitch given to unsuspecting strangers with intent of the closing the sale. Renowned author Margaret Atwood compared evangelism to indecent exposure in a story of Christine who was raised an Anglican and, while on a journey to Florida, met a woman who told her that she used to be a missionary. Atwood describes Christine’s reaction:

Religious people of any serious kind made her nervous: they were like men in raincoats who might or might not be flashers. You would be going along with them in the normal way, and then there could be a swift movement and you would look down to find the coat wide open and nothing on under it but some pant legs held up by the rubber bands. This had happened to Christine in a train station once.⁶

Indecent exposure is a criminal offense. Flashers act inappropriately, and cheapened what is private. The expression of intimacy becomes a means of intimidating the victim. In response to Atwood, John Bowen writes, “So this is how one of Canada’s most articulate and sensitive writers views evangelism: it is dehumanizing, violent, and inappropriate. These are strong words. No wonder many Christians back away from the ‘E’ word. We have no desire to be spiritual flashers. We just don’t want to be seen that way.”⁷ With the image of evangelism in such a battered state, it is imperative that to rethink the way Jesus Christ is presented.

C. *Lack of a Pure Faith*

Syncretism creates problem in evangelism because it produces followers who lack true faith. In some cases, people have mixed pagan or heretical beliefs with their new Christian beliefs, as John Cross discusses:

⁵ Ibid, 14.

⁶ Margaret Atwood, *Bluebeard’s Egg* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1984), 169.

⁷ John P. Bowen, *Evangelism For “Normal” People: Good News for Those Looking for a Fresh Approach* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2002), 19–20.

Syncretism is a huge problem in missions. This is not an exaggeration. For example, in some places in the world, it is reported that vast numbers of people have converted to Christianity ... Are these conversions no more than paper statistics? Well, I would be loathe to accuse anyone of falsifying records, but I think we can safely say that time has proven that a significant number of these “converts” are highly syncretized “believers.” Some consider these folk “Christians” whereas others say that there is *no way* they can be “saved.”⁸

Syncretism, which is regarded as common in foreign cultures, is an unrecognized problem in the North America. Many North American converts to Christianity have integrated the Christian faith into their non-biblical understanding of life. They may agree with the basics of Christian theology in terms of God, Jesus, and the Bible, but still act on their superstitions, such as continuing to follow their horoscope. It would not be surprising to find those who claim to have embraced Christ but have not yet rejected New Age practices. Dave Hunt and T.A. McMahon reported “in Hollywood, California, in an occult bookstore, a pair of teenage girls, whose parents take them each Sunday to fundamentalist Christian churches, browse through the parentally forbidden shelves on witchcraft, eager to discover for themselves the promised powers.”⁹

The rivalry for allegiance between Christianity and paganism that is expressed in the worship of idols or ancestor in some cultures, takes a different form in North America. Here time, money, status, education, and health are as highly exalted as the Lord God. Many Christian boards often first make “business decisions,” and then come to the Lord for his stamp of approval. Some Christian leaders have treated people with money, status, or education, differently than they should. Many in North American churches who profess Christ are in practice atheists, agnostic, or pagan, when, for example, they do not seriously pray or seek God when making major decisions.

⁸ John R. Cross, *And Beginning With Moses: Teaching Those Who Know Little or Nothing about the Bible* (Olds, AB: Goodseed International, 2002), 11–12.

⁹ Dave Hunt and T.A. McMahon, *America: The Sorcerer’s New Apprentice* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1988), 274.

D. *Lack of Cultural Relevance*

A fourth problem with evangelism, and one related to the issue of syncretism, is the lack of relevance of evangelism in today's postmodern world. Postmoderns reject the metanarratives in modernity including those in Christianity and embrace a plurality of truths, making traditional Christian approaches to evangelism irrelevant. Postmoderns accept the legitimacy of all beliefs, of which Christianity is one. In his analysis of postmodernism, Stanley Grenz states:

In a sense, postmoderns have no worldview. A denial of the reality of a unified world as the object of our perception is at the heart of postmodernism. Postmoderns reject the possibility of constructing a single correct worldview and are content simply to speak of many views and by extension, many worlds.

By replacing the modern worldview with a multiplicity of views and worlds, the postmodern era has in effect replaced knowledge with interpretation.¹⁰

Postmoderns view truth as being relative and do not accept that there are absolute truths, such as those claimed by Christianity "The diversity of religious and philosophical perspectives available to people today makes the notion of one absolutely true religion or philosophy unacceptable."¹¹ The difference of paradigms in understanding truth means that the modern methods of evangelism may not be as effective as in the past. Gene Veith writes, "It is hard to witness to truth to people who believe that truth is relative ('Jesus works for you; crystals work for her'). It is hard to proclaim the forgiveness of sins to people who believe that, since morality is relative, they have no sins to forgive."¹²

Postmoderns in North America no longer embrace the Christian worldview or even have a biblical understanding of the cosmos. As a result, models like *Evangelism Explosion*, *The Four Spiritual Laws*, and *Alpha*, which were developed in a time when unbelievers still had some biblical background, are no longer as effective as they were.

¹⁰ Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer On Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), 40.

¹¹ Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 28.

¹² Gene Edward Veith Jr., *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 16.

Postmoderns need to be reached through new models of evangelism. Grenz concludes his study on postmodernism, saying,

We dare not simply “move with the times” and embrace uncritically the latest intellectual trend. At the same time, critical engagement with postmodernism cannot end with a simplistic rejection of the entire ethos. Our critical reflections must lead us to determine the contours of the gospel that will speak to the hearts postmodern people. We must engage postmodernism in order to discern how best to articulate the Christian faith to the next generation.¹³

E. Lack of Disciples

A fifth and major problem in evangelism is that many of the existing approaches have been rather ineffective in producing disciples, the reason for which Christians practice evangelism. This thesis will provide data showing that the ratio of disciples to those who have been evangelized is low.

Robert Coleman in *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, first published in 1963, describes one popular strategy that the Christian community adopted. Coleman suggested using a process of selection, association, consecration, impartation, demonstration, delegation, supervision, and reproduction for the plan to evangelize the world. He uses Jesus as the model evangelist and states, “Everything He did and said was a part of the whole pattern. It had significance because it contributed to the ultimate purpose of His life in redeeming the world for God.”¹⁴ Coleman’s model was significant in that his understanding of evangelism was not limited to it being only preaching the gospel but also to being a process and lifestyle that brought people towards discipleship.

In the past century, numerous evangelistic meetings, campaigns, and crusades have been conducted with number of converts reported as being in the thousands and hundreds of thousands. The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA), for example, has reported that in 2005 about 3.2 million people confessed that Jesus as Lord. One BGEA report says, “As we proclaim the Gospel around the world, the Holy Spirit swept

¹³ Grenz, 174.

¹⁴ Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1973), 13.

through downcast hearts, and we know of 3.2 million be bowed before their Savior Jesus Christ. Only eternity will reveal the full harvest of 2005.”¹⁵ However, after many of the evangelistic campaigns, local pastors and Christians leaders found that only a handful of the thousands reached had become disciples who were committed to Jesus Christ.

Win Arn, a church growth consultant who conducted a follow up study on the 1976 Billy Graham Crusade in Seattle, found that the crusade was not effective in producing disciples. *Decision* magazine claimed that the Seattle campaign was the “most exciting and successful U.S. Billy Graham Crusade in years.”¹⁶ About 434,100 attended the crusade and 18,136 people made some kind of decision for Christ. Arn found that only 15% of those who professed Christ had been incorporated into a church. He pointed out that of the 434,100 who attended the crusade, only 0.29% became new members of a church,¹⁷ and concluded that there must be more effective ways of doing evangelism.

Campus Crusade for Christ launched a major evangelistic effort in 1976 in partnership with local churches. In the United States and Canada, more than 265 major metropolitan cities participated in this campaign and they produced seemingly successful results. The Christian leaders at that time were determined not to repeat the ineffective saturation evangelistic programs used a decade earlier. They were optimistic about the outcome because they were making a creative and collective use of the media in presenting the gospel and that this was the first time a para-church organization was collaborating with a number of local churches.

Afterwards, research was done in six test cities to evaluate the impact of this campaign. “The following data were collected from 178 churches in the six test cities: 26,535 gospel presentations, 4,106 decisions for Christ, 526 in Bible studies led by church members, and 125 new church members. In other words, of the 4,106 people who made decisions, 3% became church members”¹⁸ and less than half a percent (0.47%) of those who heard the gospel presentations became church members; in reality fewer than

¹⁵ Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. Annual Report, 2005 fiscal year, 3.
http://www.billygraham.org/Development_AnnualReports.asp , accessed April 2, 2007.

¹⁶ Sherwood E. Wirt, “Rescue for Seattle,” *Decision* (August 1976), 8.

¹⁷ Win Arn, “Mass Evangelism: The Bottom Line,” *Church Growth: America* 4, no. 1 (1978), 7.

¹⁸ Peter Wagner, “Who Found It?” *Eternity Magazine* (September 1977), 16.

that would have become committed disciples of Christ. Christians have spent millions of dollars with an enormous amount of time and energy, resulting in a few disciples.

The above statistics assumed that church membership could be equated with maturity in Christ. However, church membership is only an indicator of discipleship and does not equate to discipleship. One can assume that every disciple of Jesus will become a church member, but must acknowledge that not all church members are mature disciples of Christ. As well, a growing attendance in a church in North America does not mean that the church is making disciples because growth may be influenced by other factors such as biological growth, the meeting of a social need in the community, the clever marketing of the church, or the attractiveness of programs. This does not mean North American churches should cease their functioning programs but they should critically analyze whether or not disciples are being made.

Much of the failure to produce disciples in evangelism has often been attributed to the lack of follow up, a situation that has occurred because many Christians have understood evangelism and discipleship as being two separate functions, whereas Scripture sees them as one. The church's lack of follow up or lack of attempts to educate converts before or after they prayed the "sinner's prayer" has led to weak and often harmful conversions. Some people who thought they were saved because they had said a prayer were not because they not have a genuine personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Ray Comfort comments on these weak conversions when he writes, "If you want decisions, I can get them. But if you want to see people 'saved,' that's different—salvation is of the Lord."¹⁹ The cry for follow-up by church leaders is another indicator that some gospel presentations are inadequate.

II. A Missing Element in Evangelism

A. *Failure to Prepare Seekers to Understand Christianity*

Some have attributed the successes and failures in evangelism to the quantity and quality of planning, prayer, follow-up, and church involvement and to the level of

¹⁹ Ray Comfort, *Hell's Best Kept Secret* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1989), 67.

involvement of the Holy Spirit. However, other factors also contribute to the outcome of an evangelistic effort; one is the repeated use of approaches and strategies that have not succeeded and do not address changes in worldview. There is a need for an evangelism strategy that engages Christians unashamedly in a natural way with the postmodern community and enables the church to become effective in making disciples.

An incident at our church a few years ago made me aware of another gap in traditional approaches to evangelism that needed to be addressed. After a Buddhist family visited our church, they asked if they could continue coming even though they were Buddhists. I told them that they were always welcome, and eventually had an opportunity to share the gospel with the family. Their response was that it was not for them, but they would still appreciate it if they could attend our church. What can be done for people like these who have heard the gospel, but do not feel they are ready to make such a serious commitment to Jesus?

They, like many others today, did not have a context for understanding Christianity and had no opportunity to learn about the faith. Although pre-discipleship, or introducing people to the Bible and Christian beliefs before expecting them to make a commitment, was a common biblical practice, it is rarely practiced today. A Google search in April of 2007 for “pre-discipleship” revealed that fewer than forty sites contained the word. Many of the organizations that produced these sites use pre-discipleship as a pre-study tool for new believers to prepare them to move fully into discipleship. Others use pre-discipleship as a kind of discipleship among children, but no sites indicated that ministries used pre-discipleship as a process of evangelism.

B. Attempts to Provide Context for Understanding Christianity

The effectiveness of pre-discipleship and of a particular model called 7 *Discoveries* is the focus of this thesis. In this paper, *pre-discipleship is defined as a process of evangelism that engages seekers in a study of the Word of God to the point that they are able make a commitment — intellectually, emotionally, and volitionally — as to whether they will or will not follow Jesus.* It is the process that Trevor McIlwain, a New Tribes Missionary working with the Palawano people in the Philippines, called building a foundation for the gospel. He says that evangelicals make the mistake of

presenting people's need when sharing the gospel, and then quickly turning to the remedy of Christ without spending sufficient time preparing those people for the gospel.

Because Western society has a facade of Christianity, most Christian workers presume that people already have the foundations of the Gospel. We assume they already have a basic understanding of God and His nature and character. However, the vast majority of people in so-called Christian countries have little biblical knowledge of God. Of the relatively few in our countries who do attend church, most have a humanistic and unscriptural concept of God.²⁰

McIlwain developed a pre-discipleship approach after discovering that although many people in his ministry had been Christianized, they were not Christians. Because of his struggle to correct the impact of syncretism McIlwain developed *Firm Foundations*, series of fifty lessons that taught the foundations of Christianity so a person could understand the gospel fully. The lessons taught the Scriptures from creation to Christ with the use of story.

His-story, that is, the story of Christ, begins in the first verse of Genesis, for He was there in the beginning. But it is not until the fall of man that the Son of the virgin is promised, One who will overcome Satan and deliver his captives. The story of Christ then continues through the entire Old Testament in numerous types and prophecies. The New Testament records the fulfillment of these prophecies through His birth, life, death, ascension, and present glory. The story of Christ as told in the Gospels is the sequel to the Old Testament.²¹

Since the 1980s, New Tribes Mission has continued to develop this story-telling approach to the Bible because it aided tribal people in digesting the truths of the Bible and the gospel. John Cross of Goodseed International describes the value of this method, "Since tribal people know nothing of the Bible, this approach by necessity addressed those issues that exist in a biblically-illiterate society. This format of Bible teaching was

²⁰ Trevor McIlwain, *Firm Foundations: Creations to Christ* (Sanford, FL: New Tribes Mission, 1993), 28.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

found to be extremely effective in countering the confusion that results in syncretism and reaching those ignorant of the Bible.”²²

Cross adopted this method of evangelism and in *The Stranger on the Road to Emmaus*, which was first printed in 1996, he encourages seekers to first get the overview of the Bible and then to go back to discover the details. Cross writes, “Get the big picture first . . . once you have the big picture in mind, you can go back and fill in the details by getting your questions answered.”²³

Another attempt at pre-discipleship is the Alpha Course developed in England in 1977 for Anglicans by Nicky Gumbel, an Anglican priest. The approach recognizes that evangelism involves a process of study and of gaining understanding over time. “The Alpha course consists of a series of talks addressing key issues relating to the Christian faith.”²⁴ Alpha is delivered over fifteen weeks through videos and small group discussion after people have shared a meal but the lessons can be covered in ten weeks along with a weekend retreat. The topics covered range from the relevancy of Christianity to Jesus, the Holy Spirit, healing, and the church today. In his *Questions of Life*, Gumbel writes, “This book attempts to answer some of the key questions at the heart of the Christian faith.”²⁵ The Alpha Course has been very popular, and Alpha International’s official website claims that more than eight million people have taken the course in thirty different countries around the world bringing many people to Christ.²⁶

Alpha uses a personal approach that is appropriate in evangelism in a post-Christian society. Stephen Hunt, a critic of Alpha, writes,

Evangelism had therefore come to require a totally new direction — a more personal one. Moreover, it had to present a soft, not a hard sell. Put more directly, a fresh approach to evangelism, typified by *Alpha*, need to

²² Cross, *And Beginning with Moses*, 22.

²³ John R. Cross, *The Stranger on the Road to Emmaus Workbook* (Durham, ON: Goodseed International, 2000), 7.

²⁴ Alpha International, *The Alpha Course*, <http://alpha.org/itv/whatisit>, Accessed 18 September 2006.

²⁵ Nicky Gumbel, *Questions of Life: A Practical Introduction to the Christian Faith* (Eastbourne, E. Sussex: Kingsway Publications, 1995), 9.

²⁶ Alpha International, *The Alpha Course*, <http://alpha.org/default.asp>, Accessed 15 August 2007.

be one which was user-friendly. There was no room for “in your face,” repent or to hell with you, obtrusive Christianity.²⁷

The success resulting from *Firm Foundations*, *The Stranger on the Road to Emmaus*, and *Alpha* reinforced the importance and validity of using some form of pre-discipleship in evangelism. While *Firm Foundations* and *The Stranger on the Road* are helpful tools; however, it can be impractical to expect a seeker to spend fifty or even fifteen weeks studying Christianity. It is much easier in busyness of today’s life to get a commitment with a seeker to meet for a shorter time, such as six or seven weeks.

Another drawback to the Alpha Course is that while it appeals to seekers who have had a former church experience, it might not appeal to seekers who have no Christian background. Topics like “How can I be filled with the Spirit?” would not appeal to those who had no exposure to Christianity.

In an attempt to fill in the gap, I developed a pre-discipleship tool in 2004 called *7 Discoveries* to introduce Christianity to those who knew nothing about the faith but wanted to learn about it. It was intended to let them to make discoveries about the Christian faith in a holistic ways that appealed to the mind, emotions, and will.

Chapter one of *7 Discoveries*, Discover God, discusses the existence of God. Then it addresses the question “If God does exist, what kind of God are we talking about?”²⁸

The second chapter, Discover the Word of God, addresses the question “If God does exist, does He speak to us?” It provides evidence that allows people to conclude that the Bible is the word of God and is available to be studied and obeyed.

Chapter three, Discover the Bible, provides an overview of the Bible that enables seekers to gain a basic understanding of it. Many seekers, as well as some Christians, do not have even minimal knowledge of the Scriptures. Some of those who have used *7 Discoveries* felt nervous, fearful, and ignorant in attempting to read Holy Scriptures because they thought it might be too sacred to understand.

²⁷ Stephen Hunt, *Anyone For Alpha?: Inside a Leading Evangelising Initiative* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 2001), 11.

²⁸ Appendix 3

The fourth chapter, Discover Jesus, introduces the seeker to Jesus and discusses his existence, birth, life, death, resurrection, claims, and presence. A person who wants to learn about Christianity discovers Christ. The Apostle Paul wrote, “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”²⁹

The fifth chapter, Discover Love, appeals less to the cognitive side of people and more to their emotive side. Readers looking for love are challenged to consider the statement “God is love.”³⁰ The question to ponder is “Can one experience true love without God?”

The sixth chapter, Discover Forgiveness, addresses sin and guilt because the heart of Christianity is experiencing the forgiveness of God and understanding that a forgiven person is a forgiving person.

The seventh chapter, Discover the Good News, presents the gospel. This last chapter appeals to the will and asks, “What will keep you from totally following Jesus today?”

The *7 Discoveries*, which is only one pre-discipleship tool among many, has brought a number of people to Christ during its limited use. This self-published workbook has been translated into Bengali, traditional Chinese, and Spanish. The *7 Discoveries* is being used in Canada, India, and Uruguay without intense promotion, and there are unconfirmed reports that it is being used with good effect elsewhere.

There is a hunger for tools like the *7 Discoveries*, but before I allowed the workbook to more widely published, I wanted to learn how to improve it. I also needed to test my assumptions about its biblical and educational reliability to provide a sound background for others interested in using it.

III. A Study in Pre-discipleship

This thesis reports on a study into of the soundness of pre-discipleship and of the pre-discipleship tool called *7 Discoveries* and on the identification of data that could be used to improve it. *This study sought to investigate pre-discipleship of seekers as being a*

²⁹ I Cor 2:2 NIV.

³⁰ I John 4:16 NIV.

significant phase in Christian conversion and the discipleship-making process and to investigate soundness of a particular form of pre-discipleship, 7 Discoveries, and ways to improve upon the tool. The questions that needed to be addressed were *How significant is pre-discipleship in Christian conversion and the discipleship-making process and, if it is significant, what makes the approach effective?*

To answer these two questions, the study also addressed five related questions. First, the study attempted to answer the question *What are the theological and biblical factors that define pre-discipleship?* Since all theology and teaching must have its basis in the Scriptures, if pre-discipleship is an important factor in fulfilling the Great Commission, it will have its roots in the pages of Holy Scripture.

The study also sought answers to a second question: *How does pre-discipleship relate to the processes of evangelism, conversion, and discipleship?* An understanding of pre-discipleship means understanding the processes that occurs in evangelism, conversion, and discipleship. This study focuses on each of these areas and analyzes how they relate to pre-discipleship.

The study then asked *What must seekers understand and experience in the pre-discipleship process before they make a commitment to Christ?* It was important to know how the *7 Discoveries* connected with seekers motivated to learn about Christianity.

The fourth question the study asked was *How could the educational process of pre-discipleship best be conducted to enhance proper conversion and discipleship?*

The fifth question was *What is a sound curriculum for effective pre-discipleship?* No curriculum will meet all challenges posed by the pressures of theology, time, and culture; however, I wanted to ensure that *7 Discoveries* was theologically sound, practical in amount of time it required, and sensitive to people of all cultures.

The study consisted of research using primary and secondary sources and a pilot study involving the use of *7 Discoveries*. The findings are reported in the next five chapters of this thesis beginning with the second chapter, a theological reflection that establishes a biblical and theological foundation for pre-discipleship. It also introduces the theological reasoning for the contents of the pre-discipleship curriculum being studied. Chapter three is a literature review focusing on evangelism, conversion, discipleship, and how each one relates to pre-discipleship. The literature review also provides insight on

how to shape the content and presentation of the pre-discipleship curriculum. Chapter four describes the findings on educational methods and approaches and their relevancy to the pre-discipleship process. This research helped identify the aspects of the pre-discipleship process that produced disciples and provided information used to revise the first edition of *7 Discoveries* to better introduce seekers to Christianity.

Chapter five describes the pilot study on *7 Discoveries* and the reasoning behind it. Three different groups of people were chosen to study the *7 Discoveries*. All participants were interviewed using the same questions concerning the pre-discipleship curriculum. Chapter six presents the review of the study and recommendations for enhancing the curriculum. The pilot study had its limitations. Conducting the pilot studies myself may have been an influencing factor in the dynamics of the study. However, that was also a positive factor because I received first-hand information on how to improve the pre-discipleship curriculum.

While some may dismiss pre-discipleship as simply another method of evangelism, it is a necessary process of evangelism in reaching the world for Christ. It is necessary because it communicates the gospel in a way that results in a clear understanding of the salvation message. John Cross emphasizes the importance of a pre-discipleship method when he writes,

In communicating a message, the methods are seemingly endless. By method we are not referring to the *means*, which could range from the spoken word to smoke signals and drums. Rather we are talking about *how* the message is arranged in the process of passing it on. For example what is its emphasis? Is the message communicated topically, word by word, as a narrative, systematically, or by “leaping around?” All of these are dynamics that define a method — or lack of a method.³¹

The pre-discipleship approach and the *7 Discoveries* model have shown themselves to be effective outreach tools that motivate converts to become disciples. They have proven themselves in a new suburban church plant and in countries outside Canada, without promotional activity, while the increasing number of requests to use *7 Discoveries* indicates its potential for wider use. The study has identified a number of

³¹ Cross, *And Beginning with Moses*, 25.

dynamics in pre-discipleship that make it an effective tool for evangelism and a number of factors that make *7 Discoveries* itself effective.

The following chapter establishes the biblical and theological support for pre-discipleship and identifies the theological content required in a sound pre-discipleship curriculum.

Chapter Two: A Theological Reflection on Pre-Discipleship

This chapter examines the theological grounds for using a pre-discipleship process and the theology foundation for the contents of a pre-discipleship course. To do this, the chapter first examines the role played by pre-discipleship in Jews and Gentiles becoming Christians in the New Testament era. The chapter then examines the factor pre-discipleship decision-making process and, in particular, the role played in it by preparing seekers to understand the gospel. Then the chapter shows how certain biblical images and early church practices around baptism support a role for pre-discipleship. The chapter will also address how pre-discipleship may be seen through Calvinistic and Arminian persuasions. Finally, the chapter concludes by describing the theological basis for the contents that needs to be taught in pre-discipleship.

I. Pre-discipleship in New Testament Conversions

The validity of the pre-discipleship process as a means of evangelism is demonstrated in the pages of the New Testament. The pre-discipleship process was more the norm than the exception among the New Testament Christians. Before they made commitments to become followers of Christ, the converts to Christianity, first the Jews and then the Gentiles, were introduced to Christianity through pre-discipleship. When Jesus approached the disciples and said, “Follow me,”³² they were prepared to make a commitment to become a disciple of Jesus because they were grounded in the Scriptures

³² Mark 2:14 NIV.

before they met Jesus. The Gentiles who came to Christ also had a foundation in the Scriptures.

A. *Pre-discipleship among the Jews*

The first converts to Christianity in the New Testament were Jews and as this section will show nearly every convert to Christianity from Judaism had a foundational understanding of the Scriptures. Their knowledge explains the reactions and responses of many of the disciples and of Paul to their encounters with Jesus.

1. Tradition of pre-discipleship

The study of pre-discipleship among the Jews begins with understanding the historical context of discipleship among the Jews. The practice of discipleship, which existed before the days of Jesus, was often associated with prophets and rabbis. The prophet Isaiah first used the word disciple: “Bind up the testimony and seal up the law among my *disciples*.”³³ The Old Testament has several examples of mentor-protégé or master-disciple relationship as in the cases of Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, and Jeremiah and Baruch. “The disciple’s education was acquired through his ministering to the needs of the prophet. This type of training resembled the rabbinic concept of *shimmush*, attendance upon a master.”³⁴

The Mishnah, which described a Jewish man’s stages of life, reveals that study was a significant aspect of the Jewish way of life and education was associated with the study of Scripture. The Mishnah said that

At five years old [one is fit] for the Scripture, at ten years for the Mishnah, at thirteen for [the fulfilling of] the commandments, at fifteen for the Talmud, at eighteen for the bride-chamber, at twenty for pursuing [a calling], at thirty for authority, at forty for discernment, at fifty for counsel, at sixty for to be an elder, at seventy for grey hairs, at eighty for special

³³ Isa. 8:16 NIV.

³⁴ Encyclopaedia Judaica, 1st printing, s. v. “education,” *In the Biblical Period*, by Aaron Demsky Moriel (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Ltd., 1971), 396.

strength, at ninety for bowed back, and at a hundred a man is as one that has [already] died and passed away and ceased from the world.³⁵

Jewish boys as young as five began their education in a system with three levels of learning. The first level was called *Bet Sefer*, house of the book, in which the boys from five to ten years of age learned under the instruction of their father at the local synagogue. “In biblical times, the family particularly the father was the source of education. After that time, however, the growing demands of life and the expanding boundaries of Torah study made an institutional framework necessary.”³⁶ At this stage, boys were taught the Torah and to observe the *mitzvahs*, the duties, obligations and acts of kindness, that are practiced in keeping the law. It was not surprising to find most Jewish boys in Jesus’ day had memorized Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy when they were young. In describing the learning process in the biblical period, Marvin Wilson writes, “the mechanics of learning required the teacher to listen to the student repeat the lesson back to him verbatim. The most important quality for being a good scholar was a trained and retentive memory.”³⁷ The rabbis in Jesus’ day used a teaching technique later known as *remezl*, which required a student to recite large portions of related Scripture after the rabbi had quoted a portion of it. When Jesus said on the cross, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabchthani?” the Jews who heard him would have understood his statement in the context of the twenty-second psalm, which many of them would have memorized.³⁸

After *Bet Sefer*, most boys apprenticed with their fathers in the family trade. However, the best students were given the opportunity to pursue the next level of education *Bet Talmud*, house of learning. In biblical times, the “synagogues in Jerusalem, each . . . had a Bible school (*Bet Sefer*) for the study of the Bible and a Talmud school (*Bet Talmud*) for the study of the Mishnah.”³⁹ The students studied the Jewish Bible also known as the Written Torah or the Tanakh.

³⁵ Encyclopaedia Judaica, 1st printing, s. v. “education.” *In the Talmud*, by Yehuda Moriel (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Ltd., 1971), 400–401

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 401

³⁷ Marvin R. Wilson, *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 303.

³⁸ Matt. 27:46 NIV.

³⁹ Encyclopaedia Judaica, 3rd printing, s. v. “education.”

During this stage of learning, students were also encouraged to study the Talmud, a collection of rabbinic writings concerning Jewish law and tradition. The Talmud contained the Mishnah, a written collection of the “Oral Torah,” which were commentaries on the Scriptures, passed down through generations. Today Talmud study includes the Gemara, additional commentaries, and interpretations of the Mishnah. It was not uncommon for student by age fourteen to have memorized the Jewish Bible, known to Christians as the Old Testament.

These boys were also taught to ask questions as a means of communication and learning. Jacob Neusner writes,

What makes the Talmud engaging is its mode of re-presenting the Torah: through sustained analysis and argument. Specifically, doing more than systematizing the law, the Talmud encourages analysis. Its unfolding dialogue and contention invite successive generations to join in the inquiry into system and order. The Talmud shows how to apply reason and to practice logic. Through a constant flood of questions and answers, disputes and debates, the Talmud invites us to participate in its arguments and to make its issues our own. In presenting the Torah the Talmud preserves diverse opinion and encourages argument and analysis in an open-ended conversation. Here we listen for echoes of that conversation, aspiring to join in.⁴⁰

That was why Jesus could sit “among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.”⁴¹ Jesus saw himself as a disciple ready to learn. Campbell Morgan writes about Jesus as a boy in the temple:

He sat down as a Disciple. They talked to him, and taught him, and asked him questions. He answered them, and they listened in amazement. Then He did what every disciple had the right to do; asked them questions, questions arising out of the religious training He had received at home; and still they were amazed. The thing that amazed the teachers was that this Boy, simple, artless, the grace of God resting upon him, revealed in the answers He gave and the questions He asked, such clarity of

⁴⁰ Jacob Neusner, *The Talmud: What It Is and What It Says* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2006), viii.

⁴¹ Luke 2:46–47 NIV.

apprehension, and insight of mind. They had never had a Boy like that before.⁴²

After completing Bet Talmud, most boys returned home to the family business. But the best scholars went on to continue in what was called *yeshivah* or rabbinical academy. Today, the yeshivah is often associated with an institution of religious learning, as in a seminary, but this was not case in biblical times. In Jesus' day, this next level of learning was known as *Bet Midrash*, meaning house of study, where a student would study under a rabbi. "At the age of twelve or thirteen a boy finished his studies at school. If he was gifted and so inclined he went on to a *Bet Midrash* to sit at the feet of teachers of the Law with other adults who studied Torah in their spare time."⁴³ Midrash comes from the Hebrew word meaning "exposition," with the idea of searching into or examining the Scriptures. "The Midrash is the oldest Jewish exposition of the Hebrew Scriptures, made during the period of about fifteen hundred years after the Exile, largely based upon tradition."⁴⁴

The young men studying under a rabbi as a *talmid* (disciple) would follow and observe everyone of the behaviours of his rabbi in order to be like his master. This relationship of observation was considered so critical to intellectual and spiritual development that one student, according to the Talmud, even laid under his master's bed.⁴⁵ Historian Ray Vander Laan describes the commitment of some talmidim:

A few (very few) of the most outstanding *Beth Midrash* students sought permission to study with a famous rabbi often leaving home to travel with him for a lengthy period of time. These students were called *talmidim* (*talmid*, s.) in Hebrew, which is translated *disciple*. There is much more to a *talmid* than what we call student. A student wants to know what the teacher knows for the grade, to complete the class or the degree or even out of respect for the teacher. A *talmid* wants to be like the teacher that is to become what the teacher is. That meant that students were passionately devoted to their rabbi and noted everything he did or said. This meant the

⁴² G. Campbell Morgan, *The God Who Cares*, (*Books in the Master of the Word Series*), ed. Lawrence O. Richards, (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1987), 65.

⁴³ S. Safrai and M. Stern, eds., *The Jewish People in the First Century*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 953.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 184.

⁴⁵ Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 62a.

rabbi/talmid relationship was a very intense and personal system of education. As the rabbi lived and taught his understanding of the Scripture his students (*talmidim*) listened and watched and imitated so as to become like him. Eventually they would become teachers passing on a lifestyle to their *talmidim*.⁴⁶

If a rabbi thought that a young man could follow in his footsteps, he would tell him to take his [the rabbi's] yoke upon himself and become the rabbi's disciple. A rabbi's yoke was the rabbi's rules, understanding, and interpretation of Scripture. The majority of Jews had a great wealth in their knowledge of the Scriptures, and knew the law of the Lord intimately.

2. Pre-discipleship among the disciples

Jesus, who wanted his disciples to learn from him, asked his disciples to take on the rabbi's yoke. He said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."⁴⁷ When a rabbi chooses a disciple, he is actually saying to the disciple that he has what it takes to be like him. When Jesus called the fishermen to follow him, he was assuring them that they had what it takes to be like him.

It was highly likely that the disciples Jesus called to follow him had already gone through a process of pre-discipleship. They had grown up with at least Bet Sefer, and some may have participated in more intensive study of Bet Talmud. They were familiar with the Torah and the teachings of the law and knew who the Sovereign God was, so they were theologically prepared to follow Jesus.

Not only had their studies prepared them intellectually to follow Jesus, but they have also prepared the disciples emotionally, so the disciples were ready to make a sound choice. This was important because truly following Jesus is not easy and in Jesus' day not everyone could do it, Jesus warned some of the cost. In one case, a teacher of the law said to Jesus, "'Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.' Jesus replied, 'Foxes have holes

⁴⁶ Ray Vander Lann, *Rabbi and Talmidim*, in www.followtherabbi.com/Brix?pageID=2753.

⁴⁷ Matt. 11:28–30 NIV.

and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”⁴⁸

Another disciple told Jesus that he would follow him after he has finished his business in burying his father, but Jesus told him, “Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.”⁴⁹ Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”⁵⁰ Norval Geldenhuys sums it up this way:

The privilege and the seriousness of following Christ are of such tremendous magnitude that there is no room for excuse, for compromise with the world, or for half-heartedness. What a challenge and inspiration to know that He who calls us to complete devotion and loyalty, himself followed whole-heartedly the road of self-denial — yea, even to the death of the cross.⁵¹

Jesus also warned the large crowds that were attracted by his power when “they saw the miraculous signs He had performed on the sick”⁵² about the costs of discipleship.

If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters — yes, even his own life — he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, “This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.”

Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.⁵³

⁴⁸ Matt. 8:19–20 NIV.

⁴⁹ Matt. 8:22 NIV.

⁵⁰ Luke 9:23 NIV.

⁵¹ Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. F.F. Bruce (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, reprint 1983) 296–297.

⁵² John 6:2 NIV.

⁵³ Luke 14:26–33 NIV.

The cost of discipleship puts the onus on Christians to prepare those who do not know Jesus to understand the cost so they can make an informed decision. Before people can truly follow Jesus, they must be ready in their mind, emotions, and will. Pre-discipleship is that process in evangelism that prepares a person to be ready, intellectually, emotionally, and volitionally, to become a disciple of Christ.

3. Pre-discipleship experience of the Apostle Paul

Paul is a classic example of a person prepared to accept Christ because of his prior knowledge. Although he had a dramatic conversion while on his way to the synagogues in Damascus to persecute or kill those who belonged to “the Way,”⁵⁴ Paul did not make a sudden decision solely because of the drama of the situation. Because Paul was a Jew who grew up in the Jewish system of education, he was prepared for his encounter with Jesus. Paul went through Bet Sefer, Bet Talmud, and studied under a rabbi; he said, “Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God as any of you are today.”⁵⁵ According to Thomas Walker, “St. Paul had been a disciple of one of the most renowned of Jewish rabbis.”⁵⁶ The Apostle Paul had the necessary theological preparation to follow Jesus and to respond positively when Jesus challenged his heart and his will.

4. Pre-discipleship experiences of Jewish believers

In the New Testament period, all the Jewish converts had had some form of pre-discipleship, because, as discussed, most Jews, if not all, were grounded in the word of God and the law of God. For them, following Jesus was not a sudden emotional decision but a life commitment that a lifestyle of study had prepared them to make.

Because the concept of being a disciple of a rabbi was so ingrained, Jewish believers continued to think of their relationship with Christian leaders in the same way, a habit of loyalty that led to some divisions in the Corinthian church, which Paul had to address.

⁵⁴ Acts 9:2 NIV.

⁵⁵ Acts 22:3 nIV.

⁵⁶ Thomas Walker, *Acts Of The Apostles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1965), 505.

My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul," another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ."⁵⁷ Paul quickly clarified that Christians are following Christ.

He exhorted the Corinthians to "follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ."⁵⁸

Paul taught the Philippians the same truth: "Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you."⁵⁹ The idea was to follow the example of Paul in following Jesus. Paul saw himself as a model of a disciple who imitated his master so he could come closer to God. He told the Thessalonians, "We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow."⁶⁰ He understood that all believers are disciples of Christ and are to imitate their master. The Apostle Peter wrote, "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps."⁶¹

B. Pre-discipleship among the Gentiles

Accounts of conversions in the book of Acts show that Gentiles who converted to Christ had had some form of preparation for making that decision. Robert Allen Black, who writes about the pre-conversion state of those who were converted in the book of Acts, points out that the two things that they had in common were that not all were Christians and all had some form of personal practice of holiness. Black writes, "Although they are not Christians, the majority of Luke's subjects are prepared by their own conversion by their pre-conversion piety."⁶² Not only had the Jewish converts to Christianity had a form of personal piety but so had the Gentile converts.

⁵⁷ I Cor 1:11–12 NIV.

⁵⁸ I Cor 11:1 NIV.

⁵⁹ Phil. 3:17 NIV.

⁶⁰ II Thess 3:9 NIV.

⁶¹ I Pet. 2:21 NIV.

⁶² Robert Allen Black, *"The Conversion Stories In the Act of the Apostles"* (Ph D diss., Candler School of Theology Emory University, 1986), 59.

1. God fearers

In first century, Gentile practitioners of Judaism, who were called proselytes or God fearers, had a desire to learn about their Creator and were willing to go to great lengths to know God. Converts to Judaism had to go through a process of study and participate in ceremonies before becoming a Jew. Sidney B. Hoenig, in his analysis of conversions to Judaism in the New Testament times writes, “The acceptance of converts, follow the mode of Jewish law, required a definite procedure. Such action was especially important in that there was a constant stress on the purity of the family.”⁶³

A good number of Gentile converts to Christianity in Acts were described as “God fearers.” Safrai says concerning the God fearers in the first century:

The “fearers of heaven” were Gentiles drawn to Jewish religion who kept some of the observances of Judaism, mainly the celebration of the Sabbath and the abstention from prohibited food, but did not become full proselytes and did not undergo the rite of circumcision.⁶⁴

The term God-fearers, which had been used first in the New Testament in Acts 2:5 to describe Jews “God-fearing Jews” was first applied to Gentiles in a description of Cornelius in Acts 10. It said that Cornelius “and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.”⁶⁵ The men whom Cornelius sent to Peter described Cornelius as “a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by the Jewish people,”⁶⁶ a man who had been exposed to the word of God and the law of God. Charles Baker writes,

It appears from Peter’s words that Cornelius was somewhat familiar with the Old Testament prophets, as well as with the story of Jesus, for he says to Cornelius: “That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; how that God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the

⁶³ Sidney B. Hoenig, *Conversion During The Talmudic Period*, in *Conversion To Judaism: A history and Analysis*, ed. David Max Eichhorn (New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1965), 45.

⁶⁴ S. Safrai and M. Stern, *The Jewish People in the First Century*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 1158.

⁶⁵ Acts 10:2 NIV.

⁶⁶ Acts 10:22 NIV.

Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.”⁶⁷

The respect that that Jews had for Cornelius also indicates that this Roman was familiar with the Scriptures. James Montgomery Boice explains that the term also indicated that Cornelius had not made a full commitment to Judaism; he had not been circumcised.

That Cornelius was a “God-fearer” meant that although he worshiped Jehovah he had nevertheless not become a Jew by circumcision. God-fearers were Gentiles who expressed interest in Judaism and attended worship in the synagogue, had to sit in the back as observers rather than as full participants in the community. In the eyes of Jewish people it was a good thing to be a God-fearer. It meant that they were on the right religious track.⁶⁸

Another scholar, Frederick Bruce explains that many God-fearers were attracted by the monotheism and ethics of Judaism.

It is further important to observe that Cornelius, though a Gentile, was a worshipper of the God of Israel. Such Gentiles are commonly called “God-fearers”; while this is not a technical term, it is a convenient one to use. Many Gentiles of those days while not prepared to become full converts to Judaism (the requirement of circumcision being a special stumbling block for men), were attracted by the simple monotheism of Jewish synagogue worship and by the ethical standards of the Jewish way of life. Some of them attended synagogue and became tolerably conversant with the prayers and scripture lessons, which they heard read in the Greek version; some observed with more or less scrupulosity such distinctive Jewish practices as Sabbath observance and abstention from certain kinds of food (notably pork). Cornelius’ attachment to the Jewish religion appeared particularly in his regular prayer to the God of Israel and acts of charity to the people of Israel. One may say, indeed, that he had every qualification, short of circumcision, which could satisfy Jewish requirements.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Charles F. Baker, *Understanding the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Grace Bible College Publications, 1981), 60.

⁶⁸ James Montgomery Boice, *Acts: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 174.

⁶⁹ Frederick F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, rev. ed., *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 203.

The next reference to God-fearers in Acts was in the context of Paul's ministry in Pisidian Antioch. Paul spoke to the worshippers in the synagogue after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, addressing them as "men of Israel and you Gentiles who worship God."⁷⁰ Paul later referred to his audience as "children of Abraham, and you God-fearing Gentiles."⁷¹

In the Jewish synagogue in Thessalonica, Paul reasoned with the worshippers from the Scriptures about Christ; that synagogue had Jews and "a large number of God-fearing Greeks"⁷² who joined Paul and Silas. There is also a reference to "God-fearing Greeks"⁷³ in Athens, who were part of the worshippers in the local synagogue.

The evidence reveals that a large number of Gentiles who became Christians in the book of Acts had experienced a form of pre-discipleship or training in the word of God as "God fearers" before they encountered Jesus. This affirms the need for a pre-discipleship process in the Christian conversion journey and means that pre-discipleship is part of the biblical conversion process that must be incorporated into evangelism.

2. Other Gentiles

Some Gentile converts to Christianity were not directly referred to as "God-fearers," but this does not mean that they were not God-fearing Gentiles. Such was the case of the Ethiopian Eunuch. He was either a God-fearing Gentile or a proselyte to Judaism. Gerd Ludemann suggests that

Luke has deliberately left the religious status of the eunuch in the air — : Apparently he did not venture to describe him as a proselyte because of what he found in his sources; he could not let him appear as a Gentile, because the Gentile mission really begins in chapter 10" — the tradition not only presupposes the latter but also reports that the Gentile was a eunuch.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Acts 13:16 NIV.

⁷¹ Acts 13:26 NIV.

⁷² Acts 17:4 NIV.

⁷³ Acts 17:17 NIV.

⁷⁴ Gerd Ludemann, *Early Christianity According to the Traditions In Acts*, trans. John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 105.

We can deduce that the Ethiopian eunuch was a worshipper of God because he was on his way back from worship in Jerusalem and was studying the book of Isaiah when Philip approached him with the gospel. It is clear that this man from Ethiopia had had some kind of pre-conversion understanding before he encountered Jesus.

Another Gentile that did not have the label “God-fearer” in the Scriptures was Sergius Paulus, a Roman governor of Cyprus who was described as “a man of intelligence.”⁷⁵ This phrase implies that he had been investigating Judaism and that he was not ignorant of the Scriptures. John MacArthur writes of him, “As an intelligent Roman, the governor no doubt had a keen interest in new philosophies and religious beliefs. That he had in his entourage a Jewish teacher (albeit a renegade one) showed he had some interest in Judaism.”⁷⁶ Sergius Paulus certainly had enough respect for the Scriptures to send for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God, which indicates that he had a basic understanding of God, his word, and his law before he faced the Christian gospel.

The Gentile business woman Lydia, who was already “a worshiper of God”⁷⁷ when she met Christ was in a small group of women who regularly gathered to learn and to pray. Edith Deen writes, “It can be assumed that this little prayer group of which Lydia was a member had asked for guidance, and Paul had been sent to them for a great purpose, because they were receptive to the truth.”⁷⁸ When Lydia was confronted with the gospel, the Lord opened her heart to respond to it. She had already a basic foundation of spiritual truth that made her fertile soil for the seeds of the gospel. Gien Karssen writes concerning Lydia, “The seed of the Word fell into her heart as if onto prepared ground, and resulted in a new birth.”⁷⁹ One can only speculate on the extent to which Lydia understood in her pre-discipleship process, but her being prepared to receive the gospel indicates that this process existed in Lydia.

The Philippian jailer was the first person in the book of Acts who embraced the gospel without it being clear that he had had pre-discipleship preparation; yet he seems to

⁷⁵ Acts 13:7 NIV.

⁷⁶ John MacArthur Jr., *Acts 13–28* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996), 9.

⁷⁷ Acts 16:14 NIV.

⁷⁸ Edith Deen, *All of the Women of the Bible* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1955), 223.

⁷⁹ Gien Karssen, *Her Name Is Woman*, (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1976), 189.

have had some knowledge of the gospel. When the terrified jailer found that his prisoners had not fled after the miraculous opening of the prison doors, he asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”⁸⁰ The jailer must have had enough information to ask about salvation.

The response of Paul and Silas were interesting. First, it centered on believing in the Lord Jesus; the whole message of the gospel centers on Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul said, “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”⁸¹ Second, it was addressed to not only the individual, but also to the household. The gospel was intended for a community as well as the individual. Third, “they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house.”⁸² This meant that the gospel presentation to the household of the Philippian jailer was not a given in short sound bite but during a deep discussion. The most probable scenario was that the Philippian jailer lived at the prison or next door to it. This may explain how Paul, Silas, and the jailer was in the jail one minute and in the jailer’s house in the next minute. Fourth, the word of the Lord that was spoken involved a discussion on baptism. Not every person who is baptized is saved, but that every person who was saved in the New Testament was baptized. The only exception was the thief on the cross with Jesus, who did not have an opportunity to be baptized. The Philippian jailer went through a life-changing traumatic experience with God that cemented his faith and that of his household. He understood in one night what might take a period of time for others in pre-discipleship. Based on this it is evident that not every one who comes to Christ must go through pre-discipleship. However, it seems that the majority of the converts to Christianity in the New Testament, both Jews and Gentiles, did.

3. Pre-discipleship among the Bereans

The Bereans were the model in the New Testament for pre-discipleship. When Paul and Silas arrived in Berea, they went straight to the synagogue to proclaim the good news about Christ. It was said that the Bereans “received the message with great

⁸⁰ Acts 16:30 NIV.

⁸¹ I Cor. 2:2 NIV.

⁸² Acts 16:32 NIV.

eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.”⁸³ The synagogue in Berea was comprised of Jews, prominent Greek women, and many Greek men who studied the Bible before making a decision about becoming Christians. Frederick F. Bruce writes that this procedure of examining the Scriptures was “worthy of imitation by all who have some new form of religious teaching pressed upon their acceptance.”⁸⁴

The process the Bereans used involved examining the Scriptures, digesting the word, and allowing the Spirit to speak through it. The value of this process is examined in the next section.

II. Pre-discipleship Decision-making Process

Many parts of church today do not have a full understanding of the type of preparation some people need before they can respond positively to Christ, and so think that people can quickly made decision based on a little information. Much of what the church has deemed to be "evangelistic efforts" in the New Testament were only one aspect of evangelism and were more related to the reaping aspects than those of sowing and other preparatory work. Jesus said, "I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor" (John 4:38). This happened because in the New Testament, calls to commit oneself to Christ were made in the context of people who already knew the Scriptures, which allowed those preaching the gospel to build on listeners' awareness of the Creator. Thus, the seemingly quick responses found in the Bible were made as the result of a longer process of evangelism, one that included some adequate form of preparation. Before the harvest had been reaped, a longer process of “sowing” had laid the foundation that allowed people to respond positively to the gospel. Many Evangelicals, however, have reduced Christian conversion to a decision to be made as though it were some imaginary line were to be crossed. But not everyone is comfortable making quick decisions, and

⁸³ Acts 17:11 NIV.

⁸⁴ Frederick F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 327.

Evangelicals have failed to find ways to work with people who need time to think and reflect before making decisions.

The account of some Athenians' responses to hearing the gospel gives insight concerning how people initially respond to the gospel. When the Apostle Paul spoke on Mars Hill in Athens, it was the first time that many Athenians heard the gospel and they made three different, yet classic, types of responses to the gospel. One group rejected the gospel: "some of them sneered"⁸⁵ after hearing about the resurrection of the dead. Some in the audience reserved judgment: "We want to hear you again on this subject."⁸⁶ Others were receptive: "a few men became followers and believed."⁸⁷ These are commonly the three responses of those who hear the gospel for the first time: they reject the gospel, they reserve the right to hear more about it, or they receive and embrace the gospel.

Many commentators describe Paul's experience in Athens as "you win some and you lose some" situation.

Was Paul's ministry in Athens successful? The answer to this question could be yes or it could be no, depending on our understanding of Paul's goals. If we understand that his goal was to deliver a speech that was theologically impeccable and yet skillfully contextualized to the culture of Greek philosophers, we would say he was successful. Many students of Paul consider his address on Mars Hill as the finest of all his recorded speeches. If we understand Paul's goal as winning a debate with the sophisticated intellectuals of what could be seen as Harvard of the first century, we would say that he failed. And if we understand that, more likely, his primary goal was to win people to Christ and to plant a strong church in Athens, Paul definitely was much less that successful.⁸⁸

Pre-discipleship is a process for those who want to hear more. However, most commentators do not pay attention to them and group them with the mockers, failing to understand that many people, like those Athenians, need more time and information before accepting or rejecting Jesus. It is wrong to expect all people to make a sound commitment to Jesus when they first encounter the gospel. Some will, but most will not.

⁸⁵ Acts 17:32 NIV.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Acts 17:34 NIV.

⁸⁸ C. Peter Wagner, *Acts of the Holy Spirit* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2000), 436.

Statistically, the number of people that embrace the gospel when they first hear it is small. “Less than five percent of those who respond to an altar call during a public crusade . . . are living a Christian life one year later.”⁸⁹ Those who respond positively have often been prepared in their hearts by God, either through some form of pre-discipleship or a dramatic experience. Others respond because they are at a stage in life where they will respond to almost anything, but do not respond to Christ because they do not have a total understanding of the gospel.

At the same time, few reject the gospel outright when they first hear it. Ipsos-Reid polls show that over 90% of North Americans say they believe in God.⁹⁰ If a small percentage of people reject the gospel and another 5% receive the gospel, then that means possibly 90% of people have reservations about the gospel and want to hear more. This is one indicator that it is appropriate for churches to make efforts to reach this majority, who would need to hear more about the gospel. The responses to the gospel in Athens support the notion that there is a place for Christians to give seekers a proper understanding of the gospel before expecting them to make an informed commitment to Jesus Christ.

III. Pre-discipleship Images in the New Testament

A number of images used in Scripture to describe the process of conversion support the rationale for using a pre-discipleship process. Jesus used metaphors and parables that support the concept of the process of conversion being both immediate and gradual. It is immediate in the sense that the turning of direction from sin and to God is instantaneous. It is gradual in the sense that conversion is a process that takes time in the move towards transformation.

⁸⁹ Ray Comfort, “Alarming Statistics,” www.livingwaters.com/pastor.shtml, accessed December 31, 2004.

⁹⁰ B.A. Robinson, “God: How the Concepts of God Have Developed Over the Ages,” www.religioustolerance.org/god_devel.htm, accessed December 31, 2004.

A. *New Birth*

One image that contains the ideas of the immediate and the gradual is the new birth. Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again”⁹¹ during discussion with Nicodemus concerning the spiritual birth. Jesus told Nicodemus, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit,”⁹² indicating that the spiritual birth parallels the natural birth. Leon Morris discusses two of the possible parallels:

“Water” may be connected with procreation. This conception is quite foreign to us and we find it difficult at first to make sense of it. But Odeberg has gathered an impressive array of passages from rabbinic, Mandaean, and Hermetic sources to show that terms like “water”, “rain”, “dew”, and “drop” are often used of the male semen. If “water” has this meaning here there are two possibilities. Being born “of water” may point to natural birth, which must then be followed by being born “of the Spirit,” *i.e.* spiritual regeneration. Or better, we may take “water” and “Spirit” closely together to give a meaning like “spiritual seed.”⁹³

Just as a child needs time to develop before it is born, so a person needs time to develop understanding before spiritual birth occurs. James noted, “He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.”⁹⁴ Edmond Hiebert comments, “In this epistle James emphatically calls for Christian conduct as proof of the reality of our new birth, but he clearly insists that this new life must first be implanted by God. ‘By the word of truth’ names the divine means used in our regeneration.”⁹⁵

The spiritual birth begins when the word is implanted in a person; when this spiritual seed enters a person’s spirit, it begins to grow until spiritual birth occurs. Too often, however, there have been high expectations of the new birth occurring at the time of spiritual conception. Yet, the image of the new birth suggests that it would be more

⁹¹ John 3:3 NIV.

⁹² John 3:5 NIV.

⁹³ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According To John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1971), 216.

⁹⁴ James 1:18 NIV.

⁹⁵ D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Epistle Of James: Tests of Living Faith* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1979), 116.

appropriate to allow a person time to develop spiritually before inducing the new birth. It also points to the importance of Christians involved in evangelism to support this development, using a process such as pre-discipleship.

B. Preparing the Soil

When Jesus taught the parable of the sower and the seed in Matthew 13, he was teaching that people respond to the gospel depending on how ready they are to receive it. To illustrate his point, he used the imagery of how different conditions affect the growth of the seed. Jesus explained that the imagery of seed falling on a path where the birds ate it represented those who heard the message about the kingdom, but had it snatched away by the evil one before they could understand it. The seed that sprouts and then quickly withered after falling on rocky ground represents the people who initially receive the word with joy only to have it fade because they lack the roots to survive when trouble or persecution came along. The thorny ground where the seeds fell and grew but were choked up by the weeds were those who grew soon after receiving the word, only to be quickly choked by the “worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth.”⁹⁶ The fourth kind of ground was the good soil that allowed seeds to flourish. Jesus said that those who hear the word and understand it producing much fruit, like the good soil that produces fruit a hundred, or sixty, or thirty times what was sown. Charles Price says this seed fulfills its purpose:

This man “hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.” He hears the word like the first seed, he gets excited like the second, he too lives in the world and is subject to all its temptations like the third, but his roots are deep, he survives and reproduces himself. He is successful. This seed in the world accomplishes its purpose.⁹⁷

Although Jesus did not discuss the need to create good soil in his parable of the sower, this can be inferred. Even poor soil can be improved so that it is receptive to seed

⁹⁶ Matt. 13:22 NIV.

⁹⁷ Charles Price, *Matthew* (Guernsey, C.I.: The Guernsey Press Company, Ltd., 1998, reprint 2000), 157.

and supports its growth. Michael Simpson comments on the importance of preparing the soil.

Farming in modern times is very different than 2000 years ago, but the principles and impacts of planting will always apply. Seed is planted primarily in the furrowed, nourished, and softened soil — soil that has been prepared — otherwise, you are wasting your seed. Scattered seed will still sometimes sprout and grow — it may even bear fruit. But the harvest is so much more plentiful when the seed is planted in soil that has been prepared.⁹⁸

Just as a farmer or gardener prepares the land by first removing the stones, rocks, weeds, and by amending the soil with nutrients, Christians need to prepare the soil so that the planting of seed of the gospel will result in a bountiful harvest. Pre-discipleship is the preparation of the land needed for planting to be effective. The process of introducing Jesus to unbelievers through a search in the Scriptures can be time-consuming but in the end will result in mature crops.

C. *Entering the Narrow Gate*

Jesus' teaching that finding the way to life was not easy is another example of biblical support for a pre-discipleship process. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."⁹⁹ The narrow gate is the entrance that leads to eternal life in contrast to wide gate that leads to destruction. Jesus said that "only a few find" the narrow gate, which implies that finding eternal life takes effort. MacArthur writes, "The fact that few are those who find God's way implies that it is to be sought diligently. 'And you will seek me and find me, when you search for me with all your heart' (Jer. 29:13). No one has ever stumbled into the kingdom or wandered through the narrow gate by accident."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Simpson, *Permission Evangelism*, 86.

⁹⁹ Matt. 7:13–14 NIV.

¹⁰⁰ John MacArthur Jr., *Matthew 1-7 The Macarthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 455.

When Evangelicals quote Ephesians 2:8-9: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast,”¹⁰¹ they rightly point out that no one can earn their salvation. However, some Evangelicals equate salvation by grace with effortless salvation. They believe that because salvation is by grace, they do not have to do anything except passively receive it. While salvation is not by works, that does not mean it is obtained without effort. Jesus said, “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.”¹⁰² In discussing the meaning of “make every effort” or “strive,” commentators Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown said, “The word signifies to ‘contend’ as for the mastery, to ‘struggle,’ expressive of the *difficulty* of being saved, as if one would have to *force his way in*.”¹⁰³

Could it be that the effort in entering the narrow gate is in the searching, finding, and emptying of oneself before one can enter in humility? In any case, the concept of searching supports the need for a process of pre-discipleship where such a search can occur.

D. *Counting the Cost*

Proverbs says, “It is a trap for a man to dedicate something rashly and only later to consider his vows.”¹⁰⁴ This proverb spoke about making any kind of commitment rashly without much thought. Jesus never asked those who wanted to follow him to become his disciples blindly or thoughtlessly. When he was gaining popularity, Jesus said to the crowd, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters — yes, even his own life — he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Eph. 2:8–9 NIV.

¹⁰² Luke 13:24 NIV.

¹⁰³ Robert Jamieson, Andrew Fausset, and David Brown, “The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary,” in *the Bethany Parallel Commentary on the New Testament* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1983), 430.

¹⁰⁴ Prov. 20:25 NIV.

¹⁰⁵ Luke 14:26–27 NIV.

Using a couple of stories to illustrate his point, Jesus cautioned the people that following in his steps was not to be done rashly. The first illustration was about a builder who needed to count his cost.

Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’¹⁰⁶

Becoming a disciple of Jesus was not a commitment to approach lightly. Rather, like the builder, people must count the cost before proceeding. William F. Arndt discusses why:

Does one really have to carry on analogous investigations before joining Christ and his kingdom? Entrance into the blessed realm is free; forgiveness of sin and a place in heaven are there ready to be taken. Why, then, these examinations? What justification is there for urging prospective disciples to count the cost? The answer is obvious. Salvation indeed is free, but to be a disciple of Jesus means that one is engaged in a constant struggle with the forces of evil both about us and in us. To be a follower of our Lord signifies not only that one trusts him for whatever blessings we need, but that one is a lover of good and a foe of everything that is wrong. Regeneration is followed by sanctification, which involves traveling the steep, narrow path of denial of self. Christianity is the easiest religion in the world and at the same time the most difficult one. Those that hold that Jesus’ teaching grants license for serving one’s carnal desires are here shown to be woefully wrong.¹⁰⁷

The second story Jesus told the crowd was about a king at war.

Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand. If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Luke 14:28–30 NIV.

¹⁰⁷ William F. Arndt, *Luke* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956; reprint in Concordia Classic Commentary Series, 1986), 345.

¹⁰⁸ Luke 14:31–33 NIV.

Again, Jesus was pointing out that one must consider the consequences before becoming his disciple. Alois Stöger writes, “The man who undertakes anything big must first check carefully, to see whether the strength and the means he has are sufficient. The message of the double parable is: think first, then act.”¹⁰⁹ Pre-discipleship provides a process in which people can evaluate what it means to follow Jesus so they can make an informed commitment.

This examination of the images and metaphors used for conversion has shown that biblical support exists for pre-discipleship. The image of the new birth shows that the spiritual birth takes time after spiritual conception, which supports the use of pre-discipleship before conversion as a developmental process. The image of preparing the soil is a sensible picture of the need for pre-discipleship. The image of the narrow gate reveals the need for a seeker to search for the way of life, a search that pre-discipleship can support well. The image of counting the cost reflects the need of potential disciples of Jesus to evaluate their spiritual situation thorough a form of pre-discipleship before making a commitment to Christ. In the next section, pre-discipleship will be examined in how it relates and leads to baptism.

IV. Pre-discipleship and Baptism

Baptism in the New Testament church was a public proclamation of a believer’s faith and commonly occurred immediately after a person had made a profession of faith. No intervening period of instruction in the faith was required to prepare a new Christian for baptism. This section examines the immediacy of baptism after a person believed in Christ and the place of pre-discipleship in this practice. In the Great Commission, Jesus commissioned his followers again to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”¹¹⁰ In the New Testament, everyone who professed to follow the Lord was baptized in the name of Jesus, the only exception being the thief on the cross. The majority of followers were baptized

¹⁰⁹ Alois Stöger, *The Gospel According To St. Luke Volume 2*, ed. John L. McKenzie (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 33–34.

¹¹⁰ Matt. 28:19 NIV.

immediately, although the Apostle Paul waited three days to be baptized after his conversion. Henry Morris comments on immediacy of baptism:

When you understand the importance that is connected with obedience to baptism, it is easy to recognize that there would be ample reason to question whether one who refused baptism really had saving faith. Every record of a salvation experience in connection with the evangelistic ministry of the church shows that the convert was baptized immediately after his salvation.¹¹¹

While the immediacy of the baptism was natural in the New Testament, today it is often a delayed process because while many gospel presentations prepare a person to pray to accept Christ, they do not prepare that person for baptism. The need for subsequent follow-up and baptismal classes indicates that current gospel presentations are weak in preparing people to understand the Christian faith. Pre-discipleship, a practice that leads to authentic discipleship, has been overlooked in our theology and practice.

The language in the command to “make disciples” in Matthew 28:19-20 is another important clue to the role of pre-discipleship in preparing people for baptism. This command is modified by the participles “baptizing” and “teaching,” which clarify what it means to make disciples. G. R. Beasley-Murray explains that there is a strong link to baptism and teaching in discipleship making:

From the linguistic point of view, Lindblom has pointed out that when participles in Greek are co-ordinated with the main verb they are linked by means of a *καί*, or *τε... καί*, or *δέ*: if they follow one another without any such binding conjunction or particle they must be viewed as depending on one another or depending in differing ways on the chief verb. This accords with the situation envisaged in the Commission, that proclamation of the redemption of Christ should be made and those responding in repentance and faith should be baptized and come under instruction.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Henry M. Morris III, *Baptism: How Important Is It?* (Denver, CO: Accent Books, 1978), 103–104.

¹¹² G.R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism In The New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1962), 89.

Beasley-Murray concluded that the “baptizing belongs to the means by which a disciple is made. The instruction comes after.”¹¹³ Like many, Beasley-Murray, assumed that the instruction comes after baptism and not before it. Yet, as he pointed out, the language of the text in the Great Commission allows for the teaching to occur before baptism. Pre-discipleship can bring those who will believe to the place where they have enough understanding to enter the waters of baptism.

Other Scriptures seemed to imply that people received teaching before baptism. The writer of Hebrews chastised the Jewish believers concerning their immature faith and encouraged them to move on from the elementary truths of God’s word into more solid food.

We have must to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to each you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. Therefore, let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.¹¹⁴

Part of this elementary teaching was instruction about baptism, though whether the pre-baptismal teaching included part or all the elementary truths mentioned in Hebrews is unknown. Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown describe the elementary teachings mentioned as a catechism: “the six particulars here specified had been, as it were, *the Christian Catechism* of the Old Testament.”¹¹⁵

The early post-apostolic church practiced a process of catechesis so new converts were taught before baptism. Robert Bradley writes concerning the church near the end of the second century, “For catechesis, the elementary systematic teaching of the faith, though clearly distinct from evangelization (and apologetics) on the one hand, and from homiletics (and theology) on the other, nevertheless is closely related to them in the

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Heb.5:11–6:2 NIV.

¹¹⁵ Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, 1297.

living milieu of the historical church.”¹¹⁶ Bradley described the catechumenate as part of the process before baptism.

The catechumenate — whatever might be its overall duration — always ended within a definite time-frame: the season of Lent. This tie-in was detailed and elaborate, clearly conveying the supreme importance attached to the annual celebration of the Paschal Mystery as the time par excellence for the renewal of the Church in her members . . . This ceremony usually took place on Palm Sunday, and so symbolized the completion, by the official teacher of the faith, of the catechumen’s formal instruction. And thus they were ready for their formal profession of faith at the Easter Vigil, and their reception of the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and Holy Eucharist.¹¹⁷

It is evident that the pre-discipleship process was practiced in the New Testament and in the early church before baptism. The catechumenate gave evidence that converts to Christianity had systematic teaching before they could be baptized. This was another confirmation of the existence of a pre-discipleship process in the early church.

V. Pre-discipleship and Theological Persuasions

This section considers how pre-discipleship may be understood by theologians to be a process in the spectrums of both Calvinistic and Arminian theological persuasions. It is necessary to understand that pre-discipleship is not the practice of one theological persuasion, but one that resonates with many theological persuasions. Calvinists may see pre-discipleship as God’s sovereign means to draw the elect towards his irresistible grace. According to John Calvin, “faith is the knowledge of the divine will towards us, discovered from his Word.”¹¹⁸ Pre-discipleship, to the Calvinist, would be the act of faith by the elect seeking God through his word. Calvin wrote,

We do not deny that it is the nature of faith to assent to God’s truth in whatever way he speaks: we only want to find out what faith can find in

¹¹⁶ Robert I. Bradley, *The Roman Catechism in the Catechetical Tradition of the Church* ((Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1990), 9.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 14.

¹¹⁸ John Calvin, *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, edited by Tony Lane and Hilary Osborne (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987), 145.

God's Word, to lean and to rely upon. When conscience is only aware of wrath and indignation, how can it do anything but tremble and be afraid and how can it avoid turning away from the God whom it dreads? But faith ought to seek God, not turn from him.¹¹⁹

Arminians may see pre-discipleship as man's initial response to God's grace. Those in the Arminian camp view seekers of God as people who have God's grace working in their lives. Corrie Cieslukowski and Elmer Colyer said, "The Methodist Societies (roughly analogous to a congregation) and the small-group class meetings were open to anyone who was seeking God, because if you were a seeker it could only mean that God's convicting grace was already at work in your life."¹²⁰

Theologically pre-discipleship has a legitimate place in both Calvinist and Arminian views of *Ordo Salutis* ("the order of salvation"). Pre-discipleship would resonate with the Reformed view because it would be one of the steps or stages in the salvation of a believer in relation to election, foreknowledge, predestination, redemption, regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification. Historically, the Reformed position believed that the regeneration of the spirit in man was a prerequisite to faith and repentance. Pre-discipleship would be a means the Spirit of God uses to bring clarity regarding the seeker's need for salvation in the process of regeneration.

On the other hand, the Arminian position on *Ordo Salutis* is that election is based on one's faith and response to the gospel. Arminians may understand pre-discipleship as the beginning of man's response towards the grace of God. The fourth article of Arminianism stated:

That man has not saving grace of himself, nor of the energy of his free-will, inasmuch as he, in the state of apostasy and sin, can of and by himself neither think, will, nor do anything that is truly good (such as saving faith eminently is); but that it is needful that he be born again of God in Christ, through his Holy Spirit, and renewed in understanding, inclination, or will, and all his powers, in order that he may rightly understand, think, will, and effect what is truly good, according to the word of Christ.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 145–146.

¹²⁰ Corrie M. Aukema Cieslukowski and Elmer M. Colyer, "Wesley's Trinitarian *Ordo Salutis*," *Reformation and Revival* 14 (Number 4, 2005): 105–131.

¹²¹ David Nettleton, *Chosen to Salvation: Select Thought on the Doctrine of Election* (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Press, 1983), 41.

Thus, pre-discipleship would be seen as the initial positive response to God's grace rather than a rejection of God's grace. It would be part of the process of faith before regeneration. Gordon Olson writes, "Man is unable to contribute one iota to his own salvation, but we are held accountable for our response to God's revelation, both general and special, in the gospel. Just as Lucifer and Adam were held responsible for the exercise of their free wills in sin against God, just as really, all humans, although enslaved to sin are accountable to exercise their wills in repentance and faith. Indeed, we are even commanded to seek God."¹²²

The process of pre-discipleship is not an obscure teaching in a corner of theological thought but it fits into both spectrums of Calvinistic and Arminian persuasions.

VI. The Contents of Pre-discipleship Courses

If pre-discipleship, as has been is to be used today, then courses need to be developed with content that will provide people who have some or no knowledge of Christianity with the foundation to decide to follow Jesus. The Bible itself is the best model and source of theologically sound material and the following section identifies and examines the basic topics for effective pre-discipleship classes: the person of God, the Bible, Jesus Christ, love of God, forgiveness, and the gospel

A. The Person of God

A pre-discipleship curriculum needs to begin with God because the course must be theocentric rather than anthropocentric. The Bible itself begins with God. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."¹²³ This is the Creator that the Israelites were to know. "You were shown these things so that you might know that the Lord is God; besides him there is no other."¹²⁴ Nor was the reality of knowing God exclusive to the Israelites. The prophet Isaiah writes, "Do you not know? Have you not heard? The

¹²² C. Gordon Olson, *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism: An Inductive, Mediate Theology of Salvation* (Cedar Knolls, NJ: Global Gospel Publishers, 2002), 110.

¹²³ Gen 1:1 NIV.

¹²⁴ Deut. 4:35 NIV.

Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.”¹²⁵

When the apostle Paul began a dialogue with pagan people in the meeting of the Areopagus in Athens, he began with God.

The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.¹²⁶

Beginning with God still has power today as demonstrated in Rick Warren’s pre-discipleship curriculum *The Purpose Driven Life*. He writes, “It’s not about you. The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfillment, your peace of mind, or even your happiness. It’s far greater than your family, your career, or even your wildest dreams and ambitions. If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God.”¹²⁷ All pre-discipleship curricula must begin with God.

B. *The Word of God*

Next, pre-discipleship curriculum should teach the word of God so a seeker is familiar with the validity and contents of Scripture and has a good understanding of the law of God. The majority of those in the New Testament who came to believe in Christ had a high regard for the Scriptures when they believed. In Jesus’ day, knowledge of the Law and the Prophets prepared people to accept Jesus’ claims. Jesus told the Jews who wanted to killed Him, “You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.”¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Isa. 40:28 NIV.

¹²⁶ Acts 17:24–27 NIV.

¹²⁷ Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 17.

¹²⁸ John 5:39–40 NIV.

The experience of the Apostle Paul and Barnabas in Pisidian Antioch shows the importance of the word of God in the New Testament church. Paul used the Scriptures to teach about Jesus to the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles in the synagogue. When a large crowd wanted to hear more, some of the Jews were jealous and critical. Paul and Barnabas answered saying, “We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. For this is what the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’”¹²⁹ The Gentiles, however, responded with respect for the word of God. “When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.”¹³⁰

A pre-discipleship curriculum needs to help seekers gain a respect for and understanding of the word of God as the authority for all life and practice. The Bible contains a number of truths about Scripture that are important for seekers to know. Seekers must understand that “all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.”¹³¹ They must know that the Creator of the universe has revealed himself through Holy Scripture. They need to be familiar with the Bible — Old and New Testament. They need to know the law of God in order to understand their sinful status before God and need of his mercy and grace.

Seekers must ultimately be exposed to the word of God by hearing it. Jeremiah writes to the Jews, “Hear the word of the Lord, O house of Jacob, all you clans of the house of Israel.”¹³² God also wanted those who are not his people to listen to his word. “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”¹³³

The word of God must also be understood as God’s law because then people can understand what sin is in the eyes of God.. The psalmist writes, “All your words are true; all your righteous laws are eternal.” (Psalm 119:160) The law reveals to people their sin

¹²⁹ Acts 13:46–47 NIV.

¹³⁰ Acts 13:48 NIV.

¹³¹ II Tim. 3:16 NIV.

¹³² Jer. 2:4 NIV.

¹³³ Rom. 10:17 NIV.

and guilt before the Holy God. The law was given to show that all are lawbreakers. “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.” (James 2:10) Only when sinners understand their sinfulness before God can they then realize their need for God’s mercy and grace. The Apostle Paul said that “the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ.” (Galatians 3:24)

Biblical scholars support the important role played by the Bible and law of God in evangelistic outreach and by extension in a pre-discipleship curriculum. Seekers may or may not yet have accepted the Bible as authority in their spiritual journey, but it is important for them to understand that those who follow Jesus do. J. I. Packer explains what needs to be understood about the authority of the Bible:

Since the books were written, not to mystify, but to be understood, and since their divine Inspirer is himself present to be their interpreter, we may expect their meaning and bearing to make itself clear to us from within, as the messages of other books do, if only we attend expectantly. Then the biblical message must be allowed to confirm or correct the Church’s traditions and assumptions on the one hand and our roving individual speculations on the other. It is in these terms that the authority of the Bible should be understood.¹³⁴

Trevor McIlwain saw the law as a means in which God prepares the sinner for the gospel.

While people are ignorant of the perfect righteousness of God, they will endeavour to save themselves through their own imperfect righteousness. Paul said of his own countrymen, “. . . *For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God*” (Romans 10:3). If a person is ignorant of the righteousness of God, then he will go about trying to establish his own righteousness. Once he sees the holiness and righteousness of God as revealed by the Law, however, he will completely abandon any trust in his own goodness as a basis for acceptance by God.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ J.I. Packer, D. Clines, F.F. Bruce, L.C. Allen, A.E. Cundall, and D. Guthrie, *Introduction to the Bible* (London: Scripture Union, 1978), 8.

¹³⁵ Trevor McIlwain, *Firm Foundations: Creations to Christ* (Sanford, FL: New Tribes Mission, 1993), 28.

Ray Comfort also emphasized the significance of the law in preparation for the gospel message. He writes, “If we are serious about reaching this world for God, we must return to the biblical principle of evangelism and use the Law of God.”¹³⁶ The teaching of the word of God must ultimately reveal the Law of God. A pre-discipleship curriculum that introduces seekers to the word of God that contains the Law of God will prepare them to receive the mercy and grace of God.

C. The Son of God

The focus in Scripture on Jesus as the Messiah indicates that a similar focus would be important in any pre-discipleship curriculum intended to introduce a seeker to Christianity. The Old Testament pointed to a coming Messiah, the Anointed One. The psalmist predicted in reference to Zion, “Here I will make a horn grow for David and set up a lamp for my anointed one.”¹³⁷ The prophet Micah wrote, “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.”¹³⁸

The New Testament is all about the Messiah and his impact in the world. Peter acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah, saying, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”¹³⁹ When the Ethiopian eunuch asked Philip to explain the meaning of a passage from Isaiah, Philip “began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.”¹⁴⁰ The Apostle Paul writes, “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”¹⁴¹

The birth, life, death, resurrection, claims, and teachings of Jesus must be at the core of any pre-discipleship curriculum. John C. Chapman writes:

Whenever we take people through Scripture to show them the gospel — whether we are engaging in personal evangelism or speaking in groups large or small — what we must take care to do is to preach God’s gospel. God’s gospel is about Jesus — the historical/contemporary Jesus, the

¹³⁶ Comfort, 48.

¹³⁷ Ps. 132:17 NIV.

¹³⁸ Mic. 5:2 NIV.

¹³⁹ Matt. 16:16 NIV.

¹⁴⁰ Acts 8:35 NIV.

¹⁴¹ I Cor. 2:2 NIV.

Jesus who died and rose again taking the punishment we deserved for our sins, the Jesus who is LORD, King in the Kingdom of Heaven.¹⁴²

D. The Love of God

The emphasis in the New Testament on the importance of the message of love in Christianity indicates that Christian teachings on love would be an important part of any pre-discipleship curriculum. The Apostle Paul writes, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”¹⁴³ Central to the teaching of Jesus is love, which identifies a disciple of Jesus. Jesus said, “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”¹⁴⁴ The Apostle John also understood love as central to Christianity when he writes, “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.”¹⁴⁵

A person who studies Christianity without understanding the love behind it only gains information. But when people begin to understand the Christian faith in the context of love, then they begin to grasp the emotive and social aspects of the Christian faith meant to be lived out in community. Bernard Brady writes, “It is fundamental to Christian teaching that God is love and Christians ought to love God and love their neighbors.”¹⁴⁶

E. The Forgiveness of God

Forgiveness is a progressive theme throughout the Scriptures, which suggests that the forgiveness of God is a key truth and teaching to include in a pre-discipleship curriculum. LeRon Shults writes about dominance of forgiveness and grace in Scripture:

¹⁴² John C. Chapman, *Know and Tell the Gospel* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1985), 22.

¹⁴³ Rom. 5:8 NIV.

¹⁴⁴ John 13:35 NIV.

¹⁴⁵ I John 4:7–8 NIV.

¹⁴⁶ Bernard V. Brady, *Christian Love: How Christians Through the Ages Have Understood Love* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2003), 52.

In both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament we can trace a trajectory in the development of the understanding of God: in light of the revelation of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, the ultimate statement is that God *is* love. Divine justice is not opposed to divine mercy, but is encompassed within and fulfilled by it. I suggest that the overarching meaning of forgiveness in Scripture is manifesting and sharing grace.¹⁴⁷

The Old Testament law demanded that when a sin was committed an offering be made in the form of an animal sacrifice so that “the priest will make atonement for them, and they will be forgiven.”¹⁴⁸ Receiving forgiveness from God for sin and forgiving others for their sins is central to the teachings of Jesus in the New Testament. Peter told the people in Jerusalem, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.”¹⁴⁹ The Apostle John writes, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness”¹⁵⁰

Forgiveness taught in the Scriptures is not limited to God forgiving men and women, but includes men and women forgiving one another. When he taught the disciples to pray Jesus said, “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”¹⁵¹ He also taught, “For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins your Father will not forgive your sins.”¹⁵² Forgiveness was a key truth in the writings of the Apostle Paul. He writes, “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”¹⁵³ It is important to include the teaching of forgiveness in any introductory curriculum to Christianity.

¹⁴⁷ F. LeRon Shults and Steven J. Sandage, *The Faces of Forgiveness: Searching for Wholeness and Salvation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 125.

¹⁴⁸ Lev. 4:20 NIV.

¹⁴⁹ Acts 2:38 NIV.

¹⁵⁰ I John 1:9 NIV.

¹⁵¹ Matt. 6:12 NIV.

¹⁵² Matt. 6:14–15 NIV.

¹⁵³ Eph. 4:32 NIV.

F. The Gospel of God

In the New Testament church, pre-discipleship had prepared people to make decisions for Christ when they heard the gospel. To allow people to respond positively to Christ, a curriculum needs to conclude with the gospel. Paul wrote describing the main importance of the gospel:

Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved. If you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.¹⁵⁴

Scripture makes it clear that sharing the good news is not an option. Jesus commanded, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.”¹⁵⁵ Paul expressed his commitment to preaching the gospel writing, “Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!”¹⁵⁶

Scripture indicates that kingdom, as well as the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, are key components of the good news. Bernard Brady, who wrote on Christian love, acknowledges that love was not the central teaching of Jesus nor would it be accurate to say that the unifying theme of the New Testament is love. Instead Brady suggests that the central teaching of Jesus was the kingdom.

Jesus preached and lived the Kingdom of God. His teachings and actions were a witness and a proclamation of the Kingdom present in his life. The authors of the New Testament understood the imperative to love within the context of the Kingdom, which they understood as God’s present and active rule in the world.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ I Cor. 15:1–4 NIV.

¹⁵⁵ Mark 16:15 NIV.

¹⁵⁶ I Cor. 9:16 NIV.

¹⁵⁷ Brady 52 NIV.

Jesus started his ministry preaching about the kingdom. He said, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”¹⁵⁸ He taught about who enters the kingdom when He said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”¹⁵⁹ Most of his teachings were focused on the kingdom. Not only did Jesus preach extensively about the kingdom, but his disciples also preached the good news concerning the kingdom. It was said of Philip that “he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ.”¹⁶⁰ In Ephesus the Apostle Paul “entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God.”¹⁶¹ Luke writes in his conclusion in the book of Acts concerning the Apostle Paul, “Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.” The New Testament gospel is about the coming kingdom of God that is found only through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

VII. Summary of the Theological Reflection

In summary, pre-discipleship was the norm among New Testament believers. Most of the disciples of Christ studied and had a foundational knowledge of the word of God before they began to follow Jesus. This was the case with both Jewish and Gentile converts to Christianity. The factor of time and the images of the new birth, preparing the soil, entering the narrow gate, and counting the cost support the pre-discipleship process. The existence of the catechumenate before baptism adds to the support for a pre-discipleship process existing in the early church. The concept of pre-discipleship could be acceptable in both Calvinist and Arminian persuasions.

This evidence supports the use of pre-discipleship approaches today. It also supports the development of the type of curriculum that would be useful in the pre-discipleship process. The next chapter is a literature review that will review how evangelism, conversion, and discipleship relate to the pre-discipleship process.

¹⁵⁸ Matt. 4:17 NIV.

¹⁵⁹ Matt. 5:3 NIV.

¹⁶⁰ Acts 8:12 NIV.

¹⁶¹ Acts 19:8 NIV.

Chapter Three: A Literature Review on Pre-Discipleship

This literature review focuses on some of the thinking and practices that have informed the development of this thesis. It looks at the significance of the *pre-discipleship of seekers . . . in Christian conversion and in the discipleship-making process* by examining the meaning of evangelism, conversion, and discipleship, the methods the church generally uses in each area and the impact of those methods. The literature review also seeks answers to the question: *How does pre-discipleship relate to the processes of evangelism, conversion, and discipleship?* Throughout the literature review the connections, if any, between pre-discipleship and the other areas will be noted.

This chapter is divided into three main sections: understanding evangelism, understanding conversion, and understanding discipleship. The review begins by looking at the definition of evangelism in an attempt to define the work of the evangelist. It also evaluates the different types of evangelism, revealing the need for the church to rethink evangelism. The chapter then focuses on conversion, beginning with a definition. It goes on to examine Paloutzian's three kinds of conversions and the changes that occur in conversion, through the eyes of various models of conversion or change. Finally, the chapter looks at discipleship with a focus on its meaning and elements and on current practices. The findings in each area will help demonstrate the need for pre-discipleship in evangelism, conversion, and discipleship and why churches can use pre-discipleship as part of their disciple making.

I. Understanding Evangelism

The first part of this literature review focuses on a renewed understanding of evangelism. The ineffectiveness of making disciples in many evangelistic efforts demands an examination of the approaches being used to reach the world. Only after an evaluation of the various kinds of evangelism practiced today can one come away with new insights on how Christians can most effectively reach the world for Christ. Because so much has been written on evangelism with such diverse views of what it involves, it is important to begin by defining evangelism and the work of the evangelist in order to lay the foundation for the rest of the discussion on the topic. This section then examines the various types of outreach done in encounter and process evangelism, and concludes by considering a new concept for reaching the lost for Christ.

A. *Definitions of Evangelism*

The definitions of evangelism in the Christian community often do not include discipleship, which creates problems for the church because the biblical understanding of evangelism includes discipleship. This section attempts to provide a definition, first by looking at existing views of evangelism and then by describing the biblical understanding of evangelism and the work of the evangelist. The church today has had difficulty developing a holistic definition of evangelism. Ben Campbell Johnson points out the shortcomings in the understanding of evangelism in the local church; he writes, “Evangelism is being defined popularly as “everything we do.” Consequently, the basic task of reaching new persons for Christ, incorporating them into the church, and equipping them for ministry is being gravely neglected.”¹⁶² Darius Salter notes the plurality of definitions for evangelism:

There are scores of synonyms for evangelism throughout the history of the English language, most of which are included in the New Testament. They

¹⁶² Ben Campbell Johnson, *Rethinking Evangelism: A Theological Approach* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), 11–12.

include argue, speak, talk, witness, and most common, tell. In all, 41 synonyms are used an amazing 2,468 times in the New Testament.¹⁶³

Salter later attempts to form a working definition of evangelism that embraced discipleship and concludes,

I assume that when Paul told Timothy to do the work of an “evangelist,” there was a mutually understood job description, though it may not have been rigidly spelled out. Indeed, if a person is to remain a new creature in Christ Jesus, he or she will have to be a part of the community of God and its enterprises. Some enterprises will be much more evangelistically oriented than others; it will not always be easy to define which are and which are not. In H.W. Gensichen’s words, “Everything the Church is and does must have a missionary *dimension*, but not everything has a missionary *intention*.” It is of primary importance that we address intentional evangelism, while not truncating the evangelistic enterprise from the total gamut of discipleship.¹⁶⁴

In 1918, the Archbishop’s Committee on Evangelism in England collectively attempted to define evangelism. The committee concluded that “to evangelize is so to present Christ Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit, that men shall come to put their trust in God through him, to accept him as their Savior and serve him as their King in the fellowship of His Church.”¹⁶⁵ In this definition, the concept of discipleship was implied but not mentioned.

In 1966, evangelical leaders at the Berlin World Congress on Evangelism developed a working definition of evangelism:

Evangelism is the proclamation of the Gospel of the crucified and risen Christ, the only Redeemer of men, according to the Scriptures, with the purpose of persuading condemned and lost sinners to put their trust in God by receiving and accepting Christ as Savior through the power of the Holy Spirit, and to serve Christ as Lord in every calling of life and in the

¹⁶³ Darius Salter, *American Evangelism: Its Theology and Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 21.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁶⁵ Carl F.H. Henry, *Evangelicals at the Brink of Crisis: Significance of the World Congress on Evangelism* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1967), 37.

fellowship of His Church, looking toward the day of His coming in glory.¹⁶⁶

Again this definition did not highlight the disciple-making component of evangelism.

Another global conference on evangelism, Amsterdam 2000, which reportedly drew the largest number of Christian leaders ever assembled, from the widest national, ethnic, linguistic, cultural and denominational backgrounds, did include a discipleship component in the Amsterdam Declaration:

Derived from the Greek word *euangelizesthai*, “to tell glad tidings,” this word signifies making known the Gospel of Jesus Christ so that people may trust in God through him, receiving him as their Savior and serving him as their Lord in the fellowship of His Church. Evangelism involves declaring what God has done for our salvation and calling on the hearers to become disciples of Jesus through repentance from sin and personal faith in him.¹⁶⁷

With this inclusion of the making of disciples in the definition of evangelism, Evangelicals began to understand the fuller meaning of evangelism. What then is the biblical meaning of evangelism? The verb εὐαγγελίζω meaning “to proclaim as good tidings, to evangelize, to bring, to announce, to preach good news” is found fifty-four times in the New Testament. The noun εὐαγγέλιον, translated as “gospel” or “good news,” is found seventy-six times in the New Testament.

Εὐαγγελιστής meaning “evangelist,” which is found three times in the New Testament, has a different meaning than the one understood by many Evangelicals today. Each time the “evangelist” is mentioned, it means someone who shared the gospel rather than a person who held a position in a church. According to Gerhard Kittel, “εὐαγγελιστής originally denotes a function rather than an office, and there can have been little difference between an apostle and an evangelist, all apostles being evangelists.”¹⁶⁸ An evangelist was someone who shared the good news rather than a person with a

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Amsterdam 2000, *The Mission of an Evangelist: Amsterdam 2000* (Minneapolis, MN: World Wide Publications, 2001), 458.

¹⁶⁸ Gerhard Kittel ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 737.

specific title in the church. The first time εὐαγγελιστής is mentioned in the Scriptures is in Acts 21:8, where Luke called a man named Philip “the evangelist” to distinguish him from Philip the apostle. Philip the evangelist was the same Philip who was one of the seven chosen in Jerusalem to wait on tables¹⁶⁹ and who led the Ethiopian eunuch to Jesus. The writer of Acts used “evangelist” as a function that Philip engaged in rather than a position that he held in the church.

The second passage where εὐαγγελιστής is found is in Ephesians 4, a classic passage.

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.¹⁷⁰

This makes it clear that the goal of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers were to bring the whole body of Christ to maturity, which indicates the goal of making disciples. J. Armitage Robinson pointed out that in the *Didaché* that the “apostles” a generation later were like the present day “missionaries.” They would “seem to correspond to the evangelists of St. Paul’s catalogue who carried the Gospel to regions hitherto unevangelized. This mention of them establishes beyond further question of that wider us of the name ‘apostle.’”¹⁷¹ While the early church leaders had different titles, they all had the same purpose — to bring the body of Christ to maturity. If making disciples were the mandate, than some of the ministries of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers would overlap. E. K. Simpson writes, “The New Testament affords no hint of a priestly caste, ‘commanding all the approaches of the soul to him,’ usurpers of the title they clutch at; but the universal priesthood of believers, each occupying his proper place in the body of Christ, has its clear authorization. In the

¹⁶⁹ Acts 6:5 NIV.

¹⁷⁰ Eph. 4:11–13 NIV.

¹⁷¹ J. Armitage Robinson, *Commentary on Ephesians: The Greek Text with Notes and Indexes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1979), 98.

theocracy of grace there is in fact no laity.”¹⁷² The purpose for every ministry is disciple making to bring all to maturity in Christ.

The third passage where εὐαγγελιστής is found is 2 Timothy 4 where Paul encouraged Timothy to “do the work of an evangelist.”¹⁷³ This encouragement to evangelize was found in the context of discipleship. However, many, like John Phillips, have tried to understand the work of the evangelist through modern eyes instead of those of the first century.

The pastor is essentially a shepherd. His task is to feed, protect, and care for the flock entrusted to his care. The evangelist, on the other hand, is essentially a soul winner. When he preaches, people come under conviction and turn to Christ, sometimes in great numbers. Timothy did not have that *gift* of the evangelist; he was to “do the *work* of an evangelist.” He was to preach the gospel and extend the invitation; he was to talk to people about Christ; he was to be a witness and seek to lead people to Christ.¹⁷⁴

The work of the evangelist must first be understood through the eyes of first-century readers. However, Phillips tries to apply a crusade style of evangelism to the role of the evangelist, ignoring the discipleship aspects of Paul’s letter to Timothy. Ronald A. Ward attempts to change the emphasis of the work of an evangelist to mean that evangelism is work. He is pointing out that what the evangelist does is work and more than just talk. Ward writes, “Paul however when exhorting Timothy did not emphasize speech. To preach the gospel is *work*. This should arrest those who cynically say that minister merely “talks.” Just as the deeds of Jesus were words in action (they had a message) and his words had effects of deeds, so the words of the *evangelist* have mighty power and accomplish much. His words are *work*.”¹⁷⁵ However, Ward’s understanding of the work of the evangelist is also devoid of the aspect of making disciples.

¹⁷² E.K. Simpson and F.F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1957, reprint 1982), 95.

¹⁷³ II Tim. 4:5.

¹⁷⁴ John Phillips, *Exploring The Pastoral Epistles: An Expository Commentary* The John Phillips Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2004), 436–437.

¹⁷⁵ Ronald A. Ward, *Commentary on 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus* (Waco, TX: Word Books, Publisher, 1974), 209.

A significant aspect of the work of the evangelist is making disciples. The work of the evangelist in the Bible is described in the context of making disciples. The Great Commission describes the work of the evangelist as teaching the gospel to the lost nations so that they will become disciples of Christ. The context of the Ephesians passage implies that the work of the evangelist was to bring the lost into maturity in Christ. The context of the 2 Timothy letter is discipleship. Paul wrote, “And the things you had heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will be able to teach others.”¹⁷⁶ In commenting about the work of an evangelist N. A. Woychuk writes, “More accurately and especially as it would apply to every believer, it would read, ‘Let your work be evangelistic in nature.’ ‘Be a carrier of the good tidings.’”¹⁷⁷

If the role of a pastor is to bring a person from where he is spiritually to maturity in Christ, then Paul’s encouragement to Timothy to do the work of an evangelist is to continue to make disciples with an evangelistic component in the process. If the New Testament understanding of the work of an evangelist was to bring the unsaved to maturity in Christ, then this means the work of the evangelist involved an element of teaching and discipleship. The first-century Christians understood work of the evangelist as one that of bringing people to Jesus through a process of making disciples. This practice of making disciples with believers and unbelievers allows the concept of pre-discipleship to fit in perfectly the description of the work of the evangelist.

B. Evaluations of Types of Evangelism

Today Christian use many methods in their attempt to reach the world for Christ, and evangelistic efforts can range from a long-term relationship with a friend to a short encounter with a stranger. It could involve a quiet meal over dinner to a massive crusade involving thousands of people. Because of this, it is important to identify the various types of evangelistic efforts in the church today in order to recognize the diverse ways in which people come to faith in Christ. Richard Peace provides a useful framework for identifying the various types of evangelistic efforts. He identifies two types of

¹⁷⁶ II Tim. 2:2 NIV.

¹⁷⁷ N.A. Woychuk, *an Exposition of Second Timothy: Inspirational and Practical* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1973), 142.

evangelism in use today, encounter evangelism and process evangelism. Encounter evangelism involves using event-oriented methods of outreach in contrast to process evangelism, which tends to be relational in nature.

1. Encounter evangelism

The first type of evangelism, as framed by Richard V. Peace, is encounter evangelism and it is based on the assumption that most conversions occur dramatically like that of the Apostle Paul. Encounter evangelism attempts to bring people to meet with Jesus Christ. Peace defines encounter evangelism:

This is the term I use for those methods of outreach which seek to bring about in the lives of people Pauline-like encounters with Jesus. In large part, these are the evangelistic methodologies that have been used by the church since World War II. The result is that when you use the word “evangelism,” what comes to mind for most people is activities of this sort. The question is: Have we got it right? When we examine these ways of outreach on the basis of the two paradigms for conversion in the New Testament, what do we find?¹⁷⁸

Peace identifies three types of outreach that could be called encounter evangelism: mass evangelism, personal evangelism, and media evangelism.

Often evangelism has been associated with the mass crusades and a well-known evangelist. On the surface, this method seems to be an effective way of preaching the gospel; however, the results raise questions about its effectiveness. The problem with mass evangelism, as mentioned in chapter one, is that while statistics may suggest a large number people have made decisions for Christ, in reality, disciples of Christ are not being produced. Jerry Reed, who headed the follow-up for an Evangelism-in-Depth evangelistic crusade in Quito, Ecuador, reports,

By the close of the crusade 1,234 people had responded to the evangelist’s invitation to commit their lives to Jesus Christ. We had well-trained counselors and a good follow-up system net-working with most of the area churches and leaders. Yet one year later when I went back to study the

¹⁷⁸ Richard V. Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament: Paul and the Twelve* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 287.

results of that big evangelistic campaign, only 64 people (5%) could be found in churches and most of those churches were within easy walking distance of the coliseum where the meetings had been held . . . I might add that the net results for Ecuador of that year-long saturation-evangelism thrust of Evangelism-in-Depth, was a grand total of sixteen more people added to the church than would have been added without the movement!¹⁷⁹

Reed then observes that “the same was true for the Luis Palau crusade a couple of years later.”¹⁸⁰ It seems that many mass evangelistic efforts have left the body of Christ with only a few church goers and likely even fewer disciples.

Personal evangelism differs from mass evangelism in that the focus is on the individual in contrast to a group. The presentation is made through a personal testimony with the presenter using an outline of a plan of salvation. In personal evangelism, the challenge to make a commitment to Christ is presented a form of a dialogue rather than as an invitation after a sermon.

One form of personal evangelism is visitation, a method in use as early as the 1870s, when Dwight L. Moody used it in his crusades; throughout the twentieth century it has been developed and refined in North American churches. In the 1970s, personal evangelism gained popularity among the Christian churches and many programs were developed. The popular Evangelism Explosion, developed by James Kennedy, pastor of the Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, to train Christians to direct their conversations with people towards a prepared presentation of the gospel. Personal evangelism then became a sales pitch in which the gospel becomes a product and the work of the evangelist was to close the deal. While the visitation his method has brought many into the kingdom and mobilized Christians in the many churches in active evangelism, it has is not without its drawbacks. One problem is that people who might be converted through this type of evangelism are passive receivers of a preplanned presentation of the gospel. Personal evangelism then becomes a way to present a sales pitch rather than engaging in meaningful dialogue focused on the hearer’s concern. A

¹⁷⁹ Jerry Reed, “Lasting Fruit in Evangelism” in *Journal of the Academy for Evangelism in Theological Education* 11 (1995–96), 48–49.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 49.

second problem with this method is that it uses a cookie cutter presentation of the gospel, not allowing that the good news touches people differently.

As Peace pointed out, these standardized presentations of the gospel were often very pre-programmed and unwelcoming. He writes, “Personal evangelism turns out to be impersonal evangelism.”¹⁸¹ Many people who engage in personal evangelistic methods tend to give potential converts answers to questions that they were not asking. Sometimes the means for coming to Christ are made so easy that it fails to take in the account of the seeker actively searching for the narrow gate. Darius Salter explains this:

Evangelicals may be far too eager to erase the unruly elements of the conversion process, while packaging the gospel for easy, rapid, and strain-free consumption. Such cognitive reductionism means that the “spiritual” aspects of evangelical life are increasingly approached by means of and interpreted in terms of principles, rules, steps, laws, codes, guidelines, and so forth.¹⁸²

Salter further points out that “a uniformity of process quite often aims at a uniformity of product, while ignoring the uniqueness of the individual and the varieties of religious experiences.”¹⁸³ Joseph C. Aldrich criticized this type of outreach, calling it confrontational/intrusional evangelism. He points out that while this is a legitimate method of evangelism, it only reaches a small percentage of people.

Most evangelism training programs focus their training upon a confrontational approach to evangelism. However, it is naïve to assume that the majority of people trust Christ as a result of a stranger witnessing to them during a one-time spiritual transaction. The vast majority do *not* become Christians by confrontational, stranger-to-stranger evangelism. Furthermore, many are being kept from making an effective decision because of bad experiences with a zealous but insensitive witness. Much of the problem grows out of some false assumptions about the decision-making process.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ Richard V. Peace, 293.

¹⁸² Salter, 208–209.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 209.

¹⁸⁴ Joseph C. Aldrich, *Life-Style Evangelism: Crossing Traditional Boundaries to Reach the Unbelieving World* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1981), 79.

In the 1980s, the distaste that some Christians felt for this confrontational type of evangelism resulted in a modification of personal evangelism to an approach called “lifestyle” evangelism. Lifestyle evangelism, or friendship evangelism, encourages Christians to build relationships outside the church community to win people to Christ. Aldrich, a proponent of lifestyle evangelism describes it as incarnational/relational evangelism done through the steps of presence, proclamation, and persuasion. According to Aldrich, “a Christian becomes good news as Christ ministers through his serving heart. As his friends hear the music of the gospel (presence) they become predisposed to respond to its words (proclamation) and then hopefully are persuaded to act (persuasion).”¹⁸⁵

This non-confrontational style of evangelism is not without its problems. One is that those who practice it tend to be a little too non-confrontational. Paige Patterson writes, “The most telling critique of lifestyle evangelism, as far as evangelicals are concerned, is the criticism that the New Testament apparently sanctions a more aggressive and confrontational approach.”¹⁸⁶

Another problem is the motive for developing friendships. Richard Peace notes that “the biggest problem with lifestyle evangelism, however, was developing friendships with non-Christians. Aldrich (and others) points out that many Christians do not have meaningful relationships with anyone but anyone but Christians. This raises the whole question of motives for friendship.”¹⁸⁷ Becoming friends with people with an ulterior motive to convert them to Christ goes against every grain of integrity and ethics that makes for true friendship.

Media evangelism is another kind of encounter evangelism, but differs from mass evangelism in that the evangelist is connected to the audience by electronic media. Radio was the first electronic medium used to reach the masses, followed by television and film; today with internet and technology so readily available, the gospel can easily be presented to everyone in the world who is connected to media. Jan J. van Capelleveen commented at the World Congress on Evangelism in Berlin in 1966.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 81.

¹⁸⁶ Paige Patterson, *Lifestyle Evangelism*, ed. Thom S. Rainer, *Evangelism in the Twenty-First Century* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1989), 43.

¹⁸⁷ Richard V. Peace, 294.

As never before we must update our magazines, our radio broadcasts, our television programs, our firms, and our books. Compare the literature of the past century with that of ours. Tears, either of joy or sorrow, fell on every other page. There were involved sentences and lengthy descriptions. Now our books are full of hard facts, succinct sentences — and you might never know whether the hero had brown or blue eyes. But many religious editors still use the style and the lay-out and the verbosity of yesteryear. Do we realize that a picture is worth a thousand words, that an art editor is worth four copywriters? That white spaces are sometimes more important for readability than the words we use? We need more professionals, or we will be communicating only with the wastebasket.¹⁸⁸

Since the congress in Berlin, evangelicals have increasingly embraced and promoted the use of mass media to share the story of the gospel. Major evangelistic movies have been released in local theatres and Christian radio and television stations have emerged as an accepted means of reaching the lost. The increase in Christian internet ministries is another indication that Christians are embracing cutting edge technology to cross borders with the gospel. However, media evangelism is not without its limitations. One is that it is, understandably, impersonal and too general in its gospel presentation. It primarily touches those who are at a crisis point in their lives, desperate for hope, and ready to respond to Jesus. Media evangelism or any other type of evangelism has little impact on those who are not looking for Jesus.

The problem with encounter evangelism in the forms of mass evangelism, personal evangelism, lifestyle evangelism, and media evangelism is that not everyone who hears the gospel during an encounter is at a crisis point in their lives in which where they are ready to respond to Jesus. People who are not prepared to receive Christ either reject the idea of someone trying to convert them or need time to consider what they have heard through encounter evangelism. Encounter evangelism has brought some to Christ, but in reality it has failed to produce many disciples. It was a legitimate way of reaching out to people, but not the most effective way.

¹⁸⁸ Jan J. van Capelleveen “Evangelism and Communication,” in *One Race One Gospel One Task* eds. Carl F. Henry and W. Stanley Mooneyham, (Minneapolis, MN: World Wide Publications, 1967), 302–303.

2. Process evangelism

Richard Peace identified four types of outreach that are considered process evangelism: small-group evangelism, growth-oriented evangelism, evangelism via spiritual disciplines, and worship evangelism. Unlike encounter evangelism, process evangelism focuses more on specific issues and specific audiences than on a general gospel with no precise target audience. In process evangelism, the activities tend to be carried out on a smaller scale than during a mass event. Whereas encounter evangelism is a special activity with a particular methodology, process evangelism is a philosophy and practice intended to permeate all aspects of the Christian life.

Peace identifies small groups as the major setting for process evangelism, pointing out that among the variety of methods of evangelism used today, “still, the most effective witness so often springs from the *community* of believers. Today, some of the deepest and most significant witness occurs when a small group of Christians and non-Christians meet together to discuss Christianity.”¹⁸⁹ Large churches like Willow Creek and Saddleback have embraced small groups as entry points into the church for many seekers. In its small groups, Willow Creek encourages the use of the open chair concept in which an empty chair is visible during each meeting as a reminder of the community’s responsibility to reach out. Willow Creek states, “The picture of the open chair represents the desire in the church to assimilate and include new people into the group structure Some groups are prepared to receive seekers. In such cases group leaders and members must be sensitive to the needs and spiritual maturity level of a seeker.”¹⁹⁰

The strength of the small group structure for evangelism is that it allows people to engage in the process rather than being recipients of a one-way gospel presentation. Dee Brestin writes, “Sometimes we evangelicals legalistically insist that Christians be able to name the date and time of their new birth. Not every one can, but that does not mean they have not been born again.”¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ Richard Peace, *Small Group Evangelism: A Training Program for Reaching Out with the Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 66.

¹⁹⁰ Bill Donahue, *The Willow Creek Guide to Leading Life-Changing Small Groups* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 30.

¹⁹¹ Dee Brestin, *Finders Keepers: Introducing Your Friends to Christ and Helping Them Grow* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1983), 134.

Another vehicle for process evangelism is growth-oriented groups that focus on an issue of interest to the community to allow believers in a church to connect with community members with the same interest. Among the topics discussed are dealing with everyday life problems, such as marital issues, raising children, and dealing with addictions. Peace describes the value of these discussions: “Sometimes the outreach of choice will involve tackling head-on the issues that trouble people. For each of us as we go through life, problems emerge that cause great distress. Oftentimes hidden in these problems are keys to our spiritual progress.”¹⁹² Some growth groups center on personal interests such as learning to paint. Howard Clinebell writes, “Churches should play a strategic part in the growth network needed to develop the unused human potentialities in every community.”¹⁹³ The thinking is that eventually, the spiritual component surfaces and the relationship between strangers develops to the point where participants feel safe about discussing related personal spiritual matters.

A third type of process evangelism is evangelism through the teaching of spiritual disciplines in an attempt to respond to the increasing interest in spiritual matters in this postmodern era. Every year people spend billions on books, videos, seminars, and retreats concerning various forms of spirituality, from Christian to New Age. In Christian circles, much interest has been shown in spiritual journaling, *lectio divina*, and meditative prayer. Because people outside the church are interested in these matters, teaching on them provides an opportunity for Christians to try and reach those seeking spirituality. Peace points out that

It makes sense for the church to institute programs that enable people to get in touch with spirituality, both its concepts and its practices. And these programs need to be made accessible and attractive to people outside the church. This is a direct form of process evangelism. Such programs need to be characterized by exploration of various approaches to spirituality, by immersion in the actual practices themselves, and by focused discussion concerning the God one seeks to connect with by means of such practices.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² Richard V. Peace, 336.

¹⁹³ Howard John Clinebell, *Growth Groups* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1977), 128.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 340–341.

One example of using spiritual disciplines in process evangelism is the catechism course that G. I. Williamson, a reformed Presbyterian, has developed for his church in New Zealand. His approach is also an example of using a systematic approach to teach Christian truths as a way to reach people for Christ. Williamson used a catechism course because he believes that “there is a *system* of doctrine taught in the Bible.”¹⁹⁵ Church history shows that the Methodist movement developed a systematic method of discipleship making that could be described as a form of pre-discipleship. Robert Coleman describes this process:

Anyone desiring salvation from sins could become a Methodist. But this desire, as Wesley noted, “must be evidenced by three marks: Avoiding all known sin; doing good after his power; and, attending all the ordinances of God.” This involved participating in a small class meeting each week, where Methodist discipline was enforced. These informal gatherings were ideally suited to personal fears and needs, and for this reason they probably contributed more to the growth of the church than any other program.¹⁹⁶

An even earlier example of teaching spirituality to seekers of the faith are the catechumenate classes in the early church, which, as has been described, involved providing teaching and instruction before believers were asked to consider accepting Christ. John Morgan-Wynne describes the relationship between instruction of converts and baptism:

Now the act of baptism appears to have followed immediately on the act of believing, the commitment to Christ, conversion, certainly in the early days of Christian movement, as Acts reflects that story. Early teaching for converts seems to presuppose the act of baptism, in its stress on the need to go on putting of evil habits and wrong attitudes.¹⁹⁷

Worship evangelism, a fourth practice of process evangelism, is growing in popularity because supporters think the worship experience can be a powerful way for

¹⁹⁵ G. I. Williamson, *The Shorter Catechism*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1978), v.

¹⁹⁶ Robert E. Coleman, “*Nothing to Do but To Save Souls*”; *John Wesley’s Charge to His Preachers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press, 1990), 35.

¹⁹⁷ John E. Morgan-Wynne, “References To Baptism in the Fourth Gospel,” eds. Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross, *Baptism, The New Testament and the Church* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 125.

seekers to begin to understand the dynamics of God. Robert Webber who calls this approach liturgical evangelism, writes, “liturgical evangelism calls a person into Christ and the church through a conversion regulated and ordered by worship. These services order the inner experience of repentance from sin, faith in Christ, conversion of life, and entrance into the Christian community.”¹⁹⁸

In worship evangelism, seekers can attend church and be part of a Christian community before making any kind of commitment to Christ. Daniel Benedict and Craig Miller see worship as precatechesis and catechesis.

Precatechesis and catechesis are the sum total of those processes that allow for the Word of God to echo or resound in the mind, heart, and life of persons. Precatechesis aims at informing and interpreting the gospel. Catechesis aims at formation and conversion to the gospel. Both are first and foremost the work of God in Christ by the Spirit, and only by vocation, your work and that of your congregation.¹⁹⁹

Worship evangelism becomes a process in which some of the lost are being reached through the spiritual life of the church.

While both encounter evangelism and process evangelism have their strengths and weaknesses, process evangelism seems to fit the disciple-making aspect of the Great Commission better. Encounter evangelism reaches only a segment of society and is ineffective in connecting with those who are dealing with specific issues and need a more personal touch. Process evangelism is more relational, addressing the yearning for spiritual relationships and community in the postmodern world. As the church moves more from encounter evangelism to process evangelism, the use of catechetical instruction may again become more prominent in evangelism. A practice of process evangelism that includes pre-discipleship in contemporary evangelism.

¹⁹⁸ Robert E. Webber, *Liturgical Evangelism* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1986), 1.

¹⁹⁹ Daniel T. Benedict and Craig Kennet Miller, *Contemporary Worship for the 21st Century: Worship or Evangelism?* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1994, reprint 2001), 43.

C. Evangelism Rethought

Given that, as shown in chapter one, the church's attempts to make disciples are frequently ineffective, the church has many reasons to pause and rethink how it can improve its evangelistic efforts. A study of the literature reveals that a number of scholars have made recommendations for improvements, developments that would also help rectify a number of the problems of evangelism identified in chapter one. In order to illustrate and emphasize again the key problem in evangelism, the following discussion will show that for every thousand people who are exposed to the gospel, one disciple is made. According to the data cited in chapter one, less than 5 percent of those who hear the gospel make a decisions for Christ. The studies also showed that only about 3 to 10 percent of the less than five percent who make decisions become church members. Richard Peace supports the higher end of the range: "statistics indicate that on average only 10 percent of those who respond at an evangelistic meeting become active disciples of Jesus."²⁰⁰ The studies mentioned earlier in this chapter and in chapter one revealed that the range of 3–10 percent varies depending on the length of time a study is done after a campaign and the amount of personal follow-up to the converts. So if a thousand people heard the gospel through an evangelistic effort, less than 5 percent or fifty people would have made decisions for Christ. Since 5 percent is on the high end for even a successful evangelistic campaign, it may be more realistic to suggest a number less than 5 percent to be a normal response to the gospel. For argument sake, let us say that two-thirds of that 5 percent is the normal response to the gospel. That means for every thousand people who hear the gospel, there may be an average of thirty-three decisions for Christ. Out of those who make decisions for Christ, only about 3–10 percent become church members, which means that, for every thousand people who heard the gospel, only one to three people eventually become a church member. Although one can assume that every disciple of Christ today is committed to the local church, one cannot make the same assumption that every church member is a committed disciple of Christ. The number of disciples will certainly be less than the number of church members; however, it is logical to state

²⁰⁰ Richard V. Peace, 305.

through the studies given that for every disciple that is made, the church today must statistically share the gospel with more than a thousand people.

One area in which the church needs to bring change is in the negative understanding that society often has of evangelism. Brian McLaren points out that “on the street, evangelism is equated with pressure. It means selling God as if God were vinyl siding, replacement windows, or a mortgage refinancing service. It means shoving your ideas down someone’s throat, threatening him with hell if he does not capitulate to your logic or Scripture-quoting.”²⁰¹ McLaren suggests that instead of defining evangelism as a battle or crusade to be engaged in the modern world, evangelism should be seen as a dance in the postmodern matrix. McLaren understands Jesus’ style of evangelism as “evangelism that flows like a dance.”²⁰²

The church needs to better motivate Christians to be consistent soul-winners. Bailey Smith says that motivation of Christians “is not an easy task. It is estimated, for instance, that only five out of one hundred Christians ever win just one person to Christ in a lifetime.”²⁰³ Perhaps the reason why many Christians are not motivated to evangelize is that many do not embrace the modern image of the personal evangelist. Some Christians have an image of the personal evangelist as an aggressive salesperson with an evangelistic sales pitch that manipulates unsuspecting people toward closing a deal with the Lord. If evangelism is reduced to one methodology, then those who feel uneasy with it will not practice it nor embrace it. The passion for souls should not be lost in the distaste for a certain methodology. Evangelism must make sense in the context of the Christian life.

The literature also reveals the value of adopting relational methods of evangelism. According to studies done by Win and Charles Arn, between 75–90 percent of those who become disciples of Christ come through a friend or a relative. The Arns suggest that the *οικος*, meaning “household,” refers not only to family, but also servants, servant’s family, friends, and even business associates. They propose that *οικος* is those in one’s sphere of influence who are the most likely group to be evangelized. They conclude that “webs of

²⁰¹ Brian D. McLaren, *More Ready Than You Realize*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 12.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁰³ Bailey E. Smith, *Real Evangelism* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1999), 166.

common kinship (the larger family), common friendship (friends and neighbors) and common associates (special interests, work relationships, and recreation) are still the paths most people follow in becoming Christians today.”²⁰⁴

If Win and Charles Arn’s studies were accurate, then it would make sense for those doing evangelism to move away from the encounter styles of evangelism and more towards process evangelism. The need is to first connect with people and then in time be able to ground them in Christian teachings on the kingdom of God; this is another indicator of a need for a pre-discipleship process in evangelism. Some thinkers go so far as to suggest that the church needs to start using a catechetical approach again. William J. Abraham writes,

Proclamation must be intimately linked to the grounding of people in the kingdom of God. We shall see shortly that proclamation will in fact be carried over into the actual process of initiation, but this requires that we specify more carefully what we have in mind regarding the concrete particulars of initiation. In essence, what I am suggesting is that the church needs to reinstate the institution of the catechumenate.²⁰⁵

The catechumenate has a long history; as Robert Webber points out it was the practice of the early church.

From the very beginning of the faith, baptism was the primary symbol of coming into the church. By the fourth century the process of baptism was two or three years in length and was marked by four distinct periods of growth and three stages or passage rites. The first stage was that of inquiry (seeker stage); the second was that of the catechumenate (hearer stage); the third was the period of purification and enlightenment (kneeler stage); and the fourth was entrance into the full life of the church (faithful stage). Each stage of development concluded with a passage rite that carried the person into the next stage. These passage rites are the rite of welcome, the rite of election, the rite of initiation (baptism).²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ Win Arn and Charles Arn, *The Master’s Plan for Making Disciples* (Pasadena, CA: Church Growth Press, 1982), 43.

²⁰⁵ William J. Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1989, reprint 1996), 174.

²⁰⁶ Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1999), 147.

The North American church also needs to address the problems caused by the lack of common values and ways of seeing life in post-modernism. The post-modern mindset is also a post-Christian mindset; so many approaches to evangelism that worked in a context with people who had some Christian background are no longer as effective. Author Stanley Grenz pointed out that in the common rejection to metanarratives, post-moderns embrace tolerance and the affirmation and celebration of diversity. Grenz writes,

The celebration of cultural diversity does not merely lead to eclecticism as the “style” of postmodernity; more importantly, it overthrows the whole notion of a common standard by which people can measure, judge, or value ideas, opinions, or even aspects of lifestyle. The result is a “centerless” society, one that lacks any clear focus that unites the diverse and divergent elements within it into a single whole. As the center dissolves, the former mass society devolves into a conglomerate of societies, which may have little in common apart from geographic proximity.²⁰⁷

Grenz concludes that in order for evangelicals to make an impact in postmodernity, “the way forward is for evangelicals to take the lead in renewing a theological ‘center’ that can meet the challenges of the postmodern, and in some sense post-theological, situation in which the church now finds itself.”²⁰⁸ He points out that to have a renewed center evangelicals must be focused on the gospel. He writes,

A renewed center that is truly evangelical must be characterized above all by a focus on the gospel. As has been noted repeatedly in the previous chapters, to be “evangelical” means to be centered on the gospel. Consequently, evangelicals are a gospel people. They are a people committed to hearing, living out, and sharing the good news of God’s saving action that brings forgiveness, transforms life, and creates a new community. As gospel people, evangelicals continually set forth the truth that the center of the church is the gospel and that the church, therefore, must be gospel-centered.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁷ Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing The Center: Evangelical Thinking in a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2000), 174.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 331.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 337.

Now the church must begin to find a way for post-moderns to gain a foundation for the gospel to flourish. The catechumenate may provide a process in which post-moderns can begin to embrace truths about Jesus before making a commitment to the Lord.

Does pre-discipleship fit into rethinking evangelism? Is it a part of the work of the evangelist? MacArthur writes, “The primary duty in evangelism, then, must be to demonstrate the truth of Christianity from the Scriptures.”²¹⁰ Pre-discipleship does just that. It helps searchers go through an intensive study of the word of God examining the law of God. It allows for a careful examination, which reveals the truth of God and the will of God. It is important that the evangelistic efforts of the present day church expose seekers to the word of God. In the end, though, whatever method is used, one must evangelize in harmony with the Holy Spirit. Bill Hybels writes, “These days, I’m more convinced than ever that the absolute *highest* value in personal evangelism is staying attuned to and cooperative with the Holy Spirit.”²¹¹ Evangelism today must be fluid, patient, and sensitive to the Spirit of God. Central to it is a process of where the seeker studies the word of God in pre-discipleship.

In summary, this literature review on evangelism shows that the idea of discipleship making has been embraced in more current definitions of evangelism. The overview of today’s encounter and process evangelism reveals that traditional evangelistic efforts are not as effective as the church would like to them to be. This leads to a need to rethink our strategies for evangelism. The conclusion is that evangelism must move towards that which is personal and informative through a pre-discipleship process.

II. Understanding Conversion

An understanding of the process of conversion, which is the focus of this section of the literature review, indicates the need for pre-discipleship. This section first defines conversion and then looks at the different models of conversion, with a focus on examples from a post-World War II era to limit the time and focus of this review. The

²¹⁰ MacArthur, *Acts 13–28*, 121–122.

²¹¹ Bill Hybels, *Just Walk Across the Room* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 35.

study will then help readers understand the changes that occur in conversion, using a theological and a psychological lens. The literature review on conversion will conclude with an understanding of conversion as being a process that occurs over time, affecting change cognitively, emotively, and volitionally. The conversion process will be seen to support the need for a pre-discipleship model in evangelism.

Today many Christians regard conversion, the change from a sinful life to accepting Christ as a sudden, instantaneous decision, as though the convert were crossing an imaginary spiritual line into eternal life. In this view, which is often based on the experience of the Apostle Paul on the Damascus road, conversion is a dramatic and unforgettable experience. However, while this is not the only a model of conversion, it can create problems in the Christian community because it is so widely held. Many Christians who only know of the Apostle Paul's model of conversion have become confused if their conversion experience was not like that of the Apostle. Some who grew up in a Christian home had a less dramatic experience of conversion in becoming followers of Jesus and their conversion is as valid as those who had a dramatic experience. What then is conversion? How should Christians understand it?

A. Definition of Conversion

The biblical meaning for conversion is "turning" and to convert means "to turn." The Hebrew word in the Old Testament for conversion, שׁוּב (*shub*), which means "to turn, return, restore, bring back" is found more than a thousand times, mostly in the context of turning from evil and returning to the Lord. Conversion in the Old Testament had the sense of returning to where you were, remembering that you belong to the Lord, and of wandering no more in idolatry and sin.

The Greek words in the New Testament for conversion, μετάνοια and ἐπιστροφή, mean "to turn around." According to Kittel, μετάνοια means to "change one's mind," "change of mind," "to convert," or "conversion." ἐπιστροφή means "to convert," or "to change (someone)."²¹² Kittel pointed out that "the terms have religious and ethical significance along the lines of the OT and Jewish concept of conversion, for which there

²¹² Kittel, 722.

is no analogy in secular Greek.”²¹³ It has the idea of stopping and proceeding in a new direction. The key understanding in the New Testament of conversion is as a change in direction. Jim Wallis accents the changes that occur in conversion:

In the biblical narratives, the “from” and “to” of conversion are usually quite clear. Conversion is from sin to salvation, from idols to God, from slavery to freedom, from injustice to justice, from guilt to forgiveness, from lies to truth, from darkness to light, from self to others, from death to life, and much more. Conversion always means to turn to God. But what it means to turn to God is both universal and particular to each historical situation. We are called to respond to God always in the particulars of our own personal, social, and political circumstances. But conversion is also universal: it entails a reversal of the historical givens whatever they may be at any place and time.²¹⁴

Yet, while the meaning of conversion is clear theologically, the actual process of conversion is not as straightforward to describe as many would like it to be, because the conversion process can occur in a number of ways. Richard Peace argues that the substance of conversion is much more important than the experience of conversion itself.

Human beings have the ability to undergo remarkable transformations of a cognitive, affective, behavioural, social, and religious nature that seem to tip their lives upside down and launch them in whole new and positive directions. This is an important observation since it means that *the essence of conversion is not found in the experience itself but in the content of that experience*. In the work of ministry, the question then must be: In conversion, from what to whom has a person turned? The question is not: What is the shape of that person’s experience, and does it conform to what we consider a normative experience? But even with this qualification, the question still remains: What is genuine conversion?²¹⁵

In reality, the Christian conversion experience can be understood in different ways depending on the context, as Kasdorf observes:

Depending on the culture and social structure within which man lives, the conversion experience may be that of a people movement by caste, clan,

²¹³ Kittel, 999.

²¹⁴ Jim Wallis, *The Call To Conversion: Why Faith Is Always Personal But Never Private* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1981), 5–6.

²¹⁵ Richard V. Peace, 6–7.

tribe, or family making decisions by multi-personal actions; or it may be that of the individual persons who independently and irrespectively of others, turn one by one from sin to forgiveness. The various case stories illustrate from actual life experiences how the different types and ways estranged and separated sinners convert and become reconciled people of God.²¹⁶

B. *The Kinds of Conversions*

In the attempt to define genuine conversion, the questions that Walter Conn raises about the conversion process keeps surfacing: “Are conversions sudden events or gradual processes? Is conversion a single, once-and-for-all event in a person’s life? Or may a person experience two, three, or more conversions at different points in life?”²¹⁷ The literature indicates that not all conversions occur as a once-and-for-all event, but for many Christians can take the form of a gradual process. Conversions need to be seen through different models as people are being saved in different ways because it may result in differing models for evangelism.

In his study of the psychology of religion, Raymond Paloutzian identifies three models of conversion in traditional religion: the sudden conversion, the unconscious conversion, and the gradual conversion and the reasons for them. Paloutzian states that “the most dramatic of the conversion types was the sudden conversion. Here the conversion occurs all at once, on the ‘spur of the moment.’”²¹⁸ The sudden conversion is the type Apostle Paul experienced in which the conversion occurred in a short time span and was dramatically emotional. Paloutzian argues, “certain people are predisposed to sudden conversion because intrapersonal conflicts and frustrations (e.g., feelings of personal inadequacy, lack of self-worth, guilt over a misdeed) have been repressed.”²¹⁹

At the other end of the spectrum is the unconscious conversion in which people who have grown up with the faith cannot recall a time when they made a conscious

²¹⁶ Ibid., 25–26.

²¹⁷ Walter Conn, *Christian Conversion* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 9.

²¹⁸ Raymond F. Paloutzian, *Invitation to the Psychology of Religion* (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1983), 110.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

decision to believe in Christ. Such was the case of Timothy who learned of the Holy Scripture from infancy.²²⁰ Often, unconscious converts are not troubled by repressed conflict or personal frustrations as is the sudden convert. According to Paloutzian, unconscious convert are influenced by the social learning reinforcement and modeling that they received at home and take a lifetime to embrace their beliefs.

Gradual conversion, the third type that Paloutzian identified, involves the convert taking a period of time, ranging from a few days to a few years, to make a commitment to Christ. Paloutzian found that gradual converts were conscious of their conflict and frustration, had a cognitive need for answers, and searched the various belief systems to which they were exposed. The Bereans are biblical examples of gradual converts; they “examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.”²²¹ The gradual convert is more likely to go through an intellectual type of process of conversion, which Paloutzian describes.

Psychological explanations of gradual conversion imply a more intellectual type of process than either of the other two types of conversion. Theoretically, gradual converts may experience conflict and frustration, but these are not repressed as they are in sudden conversion. Rather, the person makes conscious efforts to resolve them. The conflicts might be personal, societal, and religious values; or the frustration might be due to a discrepancy between the person’s actual desired levels of performance in the moral or intellectual sphere.²²²

Others, such as Richard Peace, also support the concept of conversion as being a process rather than a line that is crossed:

A proper biblical understanding of conversion (derived from the seminal experience of St. Paul) will enable us to understand in a new way how the Twelve came to faith. The assumption in Biblical studies seems to be (though few address the question) that the act of joining Jesus’ apostolic band was equivalent to their conversion. But was this the case? Were they converted at the moment they responded to Jesus’ invitation to become fishers of men? Or did conversion take place when they were commissioned as apostles? Perhaps it took place when they affirmed that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. Or did it occur at the moment of the

²²⁰ II Tim. 3:15 NIV.

²²¹ Acts 17:11 NIV.

²²² Paloutzian., 111–112.

miracle of the second touch? In fact, on the basis of the understanding derived from Paul's experience, none of these experiences would qualify as the moment of conversion. Instead, each played a vital part in the final experience of conversion.²²³

Joost De Blank, the former Anglican archbishop of Cape Town, South Africa, points out that process of conversion is the work of God and primarily the work of the Holy Spirit.

The act of conversion marks a beginning — but only a beginning. It makes the convert “accepted in the Beloved”; and as a result he is admitted as a member of Christ's family. But justification is a cold and bleak state to be in — like a baby born only to be exposed and left to die. We need to always to remember that the act of Conversion is fundamentally the work of God. It is *His action* in which we fully take our share, and it is primarily the work of the Holy Spirit actively engaged in the hearts of men . . . Our salvation is wrought through the work of the Spirit the Sanctifier, and therefore it is through him that our Conversion is being increasing effected.²²⁴

The Holy Spirit is actively involved in the process of conversion and his work is on going, as Jesus explained.

“When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.”²²⁵

It is the Holy Spirit who first convicts people of sin and guides them into all truth. He influences and ultimately indwells believers, teaching about and leading them toward eternal life. Conversion is a process that takes time, energy, and effort in the individual and the witnesses of the gospel in cooperation with the work of the Holy Spirit.

²²³ Richard V. Peace, 12–13.

²²⁴ Joost De Blank, *This Is Conversion* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1957, reprint 1961), 50–51.

²²⁵ John 16:8–13a NIV.

If what Paloutzian and others say about conversion being a process, then it seems appropriate for the church to evaluate its approach to evangelism after focusing so much on sudden conversion. Pre-discipleship is a practice that would meet the need of those requiring time to consider the Christian truth while experiencing conversion as a process.

C. The Changes in Conversion

An understanding of the nature of change in conversion will help Christians to rethink methods of outreach and discipleship, especially in relation to the gradual form of conversion that many people experience. One source of information is the psychological models for conversion; most of them, like most theological models, have understood conversion as a process. It is prudent to understand conversion through the science of the mind. A healthy examination of conversion through a psychological lens will aid in the understanding of how the mind changes in the process of conversion. Cedric B. Johnson and H. Newton Malony discuss the need for study on the process of conversion:

Psychologists and biblical theologians describe the decision of the converting person as a process that brings new direction. The process begins with an awareness of God and in a later stage finds the person incorporated into the church. The new direction is evident in a turn from one faith toward Christ. Postconversion beliefs and behaviors coincide to a large extent with those of the person's new community. To what extent can these behaviors be predicted? How extensive is the change in the life of the new convert? The psychological research on personality change and conversion is inconclusive. Standard personality measures do not seem to ask the right questions. Is it purely an outward change or does conversion have inward subjective elements?²²⁶

The patriarch of psychology, William James, identifies two changes that occur in the mind in the process of conversion:

To begin with, there are two things in the mind of the candidate for conversion: first, the present incompleteness or wrongness, the "sin" which he is eager to escape from; and second, the positive ideal which he

²²⁶ Cedric B. Johnson and H. Newton Malony, *Christian Conversion: Biblical and Psychological Perspectives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), 111.

longs to compass. Now with most of us the sense of our present wrongness is a far more distinct piece of our consciousness than is the imagination of any positive ideal we can aim at. In a majority of cases, indeed, the “sin” almost exclusively engrosses the attention, so that conversion is a “*process of struggling away from sin rather than of striving towards righteousness.*”²²⁷

In their study of religious conversion, Joe Edward Barnhart and Mary Ann Barnhart describe the changes needed for a conversion to occur. They identify three dimensions of religious conversion, the psychological, the social, and the cultural, and identify the psychological in “at least three modes in which the sense of rock-bottom finitude manifests itself. They are the moral, the emotional, and the intellectual or cognitive.”²²⁸ The Barnharts also identify the social aspect of conversion in which “the individual must learn to live outside his mother’s biological womb, but he cannot live outside the new social womb. It is the social womb that prevents him from becoming totally mad and destroyed by the terror of chaos and finitude shock.”²²⁹ The third dimension of conversion the Barnharts identify is the cultural, which varies depending on the context in this pluralistic society. The significance of the Barnharts’ understanding of conversion to this thesis is that the process of conversion is multi-faceted.

Peter Masters, senior pastor of the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London and author of *Physician of Souls*, has been influenced by the Reformed and Wesleyan understanding of *Ordo Salutis* (order of salvation) in describing the changes that occur in conversion. Masters, who believes that faith and repentance follow the grace that is given through the Holy Spirit, writes about the five stages of conversion, describing each as the anatomy and order of conversion. These five stages are the conception stage, the awakened and convicted stage, the repentance and faith stage, the justification and the new birth stage, and the sealed and assured stage.

Masters views “conception,” which he calls the first stage, as an act of God in regeneration. Masters points out that “the Word of God uses the illustration of birth,

²²⁷ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 194.

²²⁸ Joe Edward Barnhart and Mary Ann Barnhart, *The New Birth: A Naturalistic View of Religious Conversion* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1981), 24.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 82.

because the *whole birth process* is a picture of a man's salvation. Can there be a birth without there first being a conception?"²³⁰ In this stage people begin to feel the void within, their lack of peace, and need for spirituality. This leads to the second stage, the awakened and convicted stage, in which people are conscious of their guilt and aware of their failure and shame before God. This is the stage where the person is confronted with the word of God and the gospel and challenged with the call to repent and believe.

Repentance and faith are the third stage of conversion, the one in which people choose to willingly trust in Jesus as their savior and follow him as Lord in repentance and faith. The next stage is justification and the new birth, in which God declares that the sinner is now pardoned, clean, just, and righteous through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. Simultaneously, the sinner is also spiritually born again. At the same time, in the last stage of the sealing of assurance and, possibly an immediate advanced level of assurance, the new believer feels the assurance from God concerning his or her salvation through the sealing of the Holy Spirit. Masters says that only two of these stages take time while the others are instantaneous.

Once conception has occurred the next stage is the awakening and conviction of the sinner; after which come (instantly) justification and the new birth . . . it must be stressed that the only stages which may be drawn out over a period of time are stages (2) and (3) — *Awakening and Conviction* and *Repentance and Faith*. Once repentance and faith are accomplished, everything else is instant.²³¹

Like Masters, Richard Peace divides the conversion process in stages; however, he identifies three main things that occur in genuine conversion: insight, turning, and transformation. The insight is the cognitive understanding about God and self that occurs before repentance. Converts must understand that they are sinners before a holy God before they can be saved. The turning is the turning from sin and a hardened heart to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. The third aspect of Peace's conversion model is transformation, which involves forgiveness, discipleship, and a new life.

²³⁰ Peter Masters, *Physician of Souls* (London: Wakeman Publishers Ltd., 1976), 83.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 88.

There are insight, turning, and transformation that affect who he is, how he relates to Jesus, and what he does within his culture. Furthermore, these movements within these spheres are all in the context of God. Christian conversion is not a generalized movement of transformation within the context of one's relationships to other people and to the world around one. It involves new insight into God, new turning toward God, and a new life lived in response to God. It involves seeing oneself in the light of God's truth, embracing a new relationship to God, and living this out within the community of God's people as a servant and witness to all people.²³²

James Fowler, a pioneer in the work of faith development, created a model that has six stages of faith, which provides further insight to an understanding of conversion. Fowler, who uses a model of stages of human development, begins with the infant stage, in which the person has an undifferentiated faith. Once infants begin to use thought and language, opening themselves up to the use of symbols in speech and ritual play, they begin to transition into the first stage of faith.

Fowler's first stage of faith was intuitive-projective faith, which relates to the intuitive-projective child, whose age is between two and seven. Children in this stage use speech and symbolic representation to arrange their sensory experience into meaning units and "they simply assume without question that the experiences and perceptions they have of a phenomenon represent the only available perspective."²³³ This is the stage in which children, ages two to six, believe that Santa Claus is real and faith is simple. It is the kind of child-like faith that Jesus embraced.²³⁴

The second stage of faith, according to Fowler, is the mythic-literal, in which children, age seven to twelve, try to sort out what is real to what is make-believe. In this stage, older children can share their experiences in story form, so the narrative form of communication is an effective medium to share the gospel with this child.

Fowler's third stage of faith is synthetic-conventional faith in which adolescents are draped with a new burden of self-consciousness. Because of this, adolescents begin conform their beliefs to their own identity.

²³² Richard Peace, 101.

²³³ James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1981), 123.

²³⁴ Matt. 18:3 NIV.

God — when God remains or becomes salient in a person's faith at this stage — must also be re-imaged as having inexhaustible depths and as being capable of knowing personally those mysterious depths of self and others we know that we ourselves will never know. Much of the extensive literature about adolescent conversion can be illumined, I believe, by the recognition that the adolescent's religious hunger is for a God who knows, accepts and confirms the self deeply, and who serves as an infinite guarantor of the self with its forming myth of personal identity and faith.²³⁵

Between the third and fourth stage, Fowler recognizes a transition in which people move from total independence on external authority to relocating the authority for their lives to themselves. The fourth stage of faith according to Fowler is what he terms individuated-reflective faith. This stage takes form mainly in young adulthood, which could range from the twenties to mid-thirties, and even the forties. This was the stage in which a person begins to “take seriously the burden of responsibility for his or her own commitments, lifestyle, beliefs, and attitudes . . . this is a ‘demythologizing’ stage. It is likely to attend minimally to unconscious factors influencing its judgments and behavior.”²³⁶

The next stage of faith, according to Fowler, is conjunctive faith. This stage often occurs at mid-life when people begin to see the validity of other systems of beliefs, and resolves the paradoxes they have been wrestling with in the previous stage. Fowler writes concerning conjunctive faith:

What the previous stage struggled to clarify, in terms of the boundaries of self and outlook, this stage now makes porous and permeable. Alive to paradox and the truth in apparent contradictions, this stage strives to unify opposites in mind and experience. It generates and maintains vulnerability to the strange truths of those who are “other.” Ready for closeness to that which is different and threatening to self and outlook (including new depths of experience in spirituality and religious revelation), this stage's commitment to justice is freed from the confines of tribe, class, religious community or nation.²³⁷

²³⁵ Fowler, 153.

²³⁶ Ibid., 182.

²³⁷ Ibid., 198.

The sixth stage of faith is universalizing faith, which Fowler says it is rare. In this stage people have lived out the conjunctive stage to perfection and have learned to transcend conflicting loyalties. This does not mean that people at this stage are perfect but rather that they reflect and model that ultimate development in the faith journey. In this stage, people display “leadership initiatives, often involving strategies of nonviolent suffering and ultimate respect for being, constitute affronts to our usual notions of relevance.”²³⁸ They become selfless martyrs for what they believe.

Fowler says that conversion, which is a matter of changing the contents of faith, can occur at any stage of faith. “Conversion is a significant recentering of one’s previous conscious or unconscious images of value and power, and the conscious adoption of a new set of master stories in the commitment to reshape one’s life in a new community of interpretation and action.”²³⁹

Another psychologist, Jane Loevinger, theorizes a seven-stage model of ego development as a process that forms moral judgment, character, and conscience in people. Loevinger’s analysis of ego development also supports the idea that life itself is a process of changes. Although her ego development is more of a psychological analysis of the changes of life, it parallels James Fowler’s stages of faith. She begins with a pre-stage call the pre-social, which parallels Fowler’s pre-stage of undifferentiated faith of the infant. The first stage of ego development is the symbolic stage in which the baby begins to use language as a sense of being a separate person, while the second stage is the impulsive stage in which children’s impulses allow them to affirm their separate identity. These two stages of ego development parallel Fowler’s intuitive-projective stage of faith.²⁴⁰

The third stage of ego development is the self-protective stage, in which a child has a corresponding vulnerability, guardedness, and self-centered and is therefore self-protective. The fourth stage is the conformist stage, which parallels Fowler’s synthetic-conventional stage of faith development. People in this stage are seeking approval and belonging from family members and peers while judging others on the externals of life.

²³⁸ Ibid., 200.

²³⁹ Ibid., 281–282.

²⁴⁰ Appendix 1.

At the transition from the fourth to the fifth stage is the self-aware level at which people are sensitive to their inner life and failings. The fifth stage in Loevinger's model is the conscientious stage. "At the conscientious stage, the major elements of an adult conscience are present. They include long-term, self-evaluated goals and ideals, differentiated self-criticism, and a sense of responsibility."²⁴¹ At this stage there is also an individualistic level of ego development that deals with issues of tolerance, emotional dependence, relationships, responsibilities, goals, and psychological development.

The sixth stage of Loevinger's ego development was the autonomous stage, in which people accept inner conflict and the complexity of reality. They are free from rigid conscience and cherish individuality and relationships; they begin to value self-fulfillment over achievement. This sixth stage parallel Fowler's conjunctive stage of faith development. The seventh stage is the integrated stage, which Loevinger saw as the highest, represents the perfection of the autonomous stage. "For the most part, the description of the Autonomous Stage holds also for the Integrated Stage. A new element is consolidation of a sense of identity. Probably the best description of this stage is that of Maslow's Self-Actualizing person."²⁴²

Loevinger's model of ego development and Fowler's model of faith development became the foundation of Daniel Helminiak's model for spiritual development, which is significant for understanding some of the changes that occur in the conversion process. Helminiak believe that spiritual development in human development is mainly an adult phenomenon and that this development began in late adolescence or early adulthood. He writes, "It is clear, then, that not chronological age but level of development defines what is meant by the 'adult' nature of spiritual development. For spiritual development is proper to the self-responsible subject."²⁴³

Helminiak begins by saying that the starting point of spiritual development is the conformist stage and uses Loevinger's fourth stage of ego development, the conformist stage and Fowler's third stage of faith development, the synthetic-conventional stage, in

²⁴¹ Jane Loevinger, *Ego Development: Conceptions and Theories* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1976), 20.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 26.

²⁴³ Daniel A. Helminiak, *Spiritual Development: An Interdisciplinary Study* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1987), 79.

his model of spiritual development. According to him this stage is “characterized by a deeply felt and extensively rationalized worldview; accepted on the basis of external authority and supported by approval of one’s significant others.”²⁴⁴

Helminiak’s second stage of spiritual development is the conscientious conformist stage, which parallels Loevinger’s self-aware level and the transition between Fowler’s third and fourth stages of faith development. At this stage, people begin to understand the world and their response in taking responsibility for their life and the world around them; they also decide what they will make of themselves.

The third stage of Helminiak’s spiritual development model is the conscientious stage, in which people do significant restructuring of their lives from conformity to their known world toward their new understanding of the things around them. They are also optimistic about their faith because of a renewed understanding of the world. This stage parallels Loevinger’s conscientious stage and Fowler’s individuating-reflective stage.

According to Helminiak, the fourth stage of spiritual development is the compassion stage, which is “characterized by a certain mellowing. Here one learns to surrender some of the world one has so painstakingly constructed for oneself. One’s commitments are no less intense, but they are more realistic, more nuanced, and more supported by deeply felt and complex emotion. One becomes more gentle with oneself and with others.”²⁴⁵ This stage parallels Loevinger’s autonomous stage and Fowler’s conjunctive stage.

Helminiak’s final stage of spiritual development is the cosmic stage, which parallels Loevinger’s integrated stage and Fowler’s universalizing stage. Both Fowler and Loevinger, who approached this stage from a psychological and philosophical point of view, admit they have difficulties describing the last stage. Helminiak suggests that the cosmic stage exists to open new possibilities in development. He views the spiritual development of a human as eternal and something that cannot be finalized in this life and points out the difficulties of using human standards to measure states like holiness. However, Helminiak did say, “if spiritual development and human development are strictly correlates, the ‘saints’ in any particular historical period or culture would meet the

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 85.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

standards of authentic human development current in their historical period or culture; and they would exhibit the same limitations characteristic of their time and place, as well.”²⁴⁶ He concluded that the cosmic stage is being in a state of holiness that is before the Creator. Helminiak defines holiness as “nothing other than human authenticity recognized as related also to God.”²⁴⁷

The models of Fowler, Loevinger, and Helminiak explain Paloutzian’s idea of unconscious and gradual conversion, while the one developed by James Prochaska explains what happens in those who convert dramatically. Prochaska’s model of change shows that there is a way to accelerate the process of change. His transtheoretical model of change argues for five stages of change. The first is the precontemplative stage, in which individuals do not feel any need to change and did not perceive themselves with the problems, regarding problems as external to themselves. The second stage is the contemplative stage in which individuals begin to recognize that they have problems. In the third or preparation stage, individuals know that they have to change and begin to think and feel that they must take some course of action to change. In the fourth or action stage, individuals engage in full-scale affirmative actions to overcome their problems. In the fifth or maintenance stage, they make every effort to prevent a recurrence of their problem. Prochaska emphasizes the importance of maintenance:

There are great challenges at every stage, and maintenance is no exception. For it is during maintenance that you must work to consolidate the gains you attained during the action and other stages, and struggle to prevent lapse and relapse. Change never ends with action. Although traditional therapy sees maintenance as a static stage, in fact it is a critically important continuation that can last from as little as six months to as long as a lifetime.²⁴⁸

Prochaska’s first four stages of change remarkably parallel Helminiak’s first three stages of spiritual development. The maintenance stage in Prochaska’s model can be seen in Helminiak’s final two stages. Both models of change can be seen as occurring over a

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 87.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 149.

²⁴⁸ James O. Prochaska, John C. Norcross, and Carlo C. Diclemente, *Changing For Good* (New York: Avon Books, 1994), 45.

long or a short period of time, which is significant in understanding the changes in conversion because both models allow for the changes in the dramatic, unconscious, or the gradual conversion.

If one applies Prochaska's model of change to Christian conversion, then at the precontemplative stage, the individual feels no need for any kind of spiritual life. At the contemplative stage, individuals realize that they have sinned before Almighty God. In the preparation stage, individuals know that they need to do something about that sin and are willing to take action concerning their status with God. The action stage is the act of repentance and the willingness to follow Jesus and embrace the Christian faith. The maintenance stage is discipleship in which people grow towards maturity in their relationship with Jesus Christ.

Motivation also plays a key part in effecting change, and it can take a negative or a positive form. When people want to help another to change certain behaviors, for example in clinical counseling, they usually try to motivate them toward change by showing them how they can avoid discomfort, pain, fear, shame, guilt, loss, threat, anxiety, or humiliation. Some Evangelicals use these motivational approaches in their gospel presentations, evoking shame, guilt, and fear, which results in some people embracing Christ because of the guilt of sin and anxiety about eternal damnation. However, there are more positive modes of motivations for conversion, which can range from the echoes of love, joy, peace, to the prospect of a deep relationship with the Creator. William Miller and Stephen Rollnick, experts on change in psychological studies, affirm that positive motivations for change are much more constructive than negative motivations.

Humiliation, shame, guilt, and angst are not the primary engines of change. Ironically, such experiences can even immobilize the person, rendering change more remote. Instead, constructive behavior change seems to arise when the person connects it with something of intrinsic value, something important, something cherished. In that makes it safe for the person to explore the possibly painful present in relation to what is wanted and valued. People often get stuck, not because they fail to appreciate the down side of their situation, but because they feel at least two ways about it. The way out of that forest has to do with exploring and following what

the person is experiencing and what, from his or her perspective, truly matters.²⁴⁹

In summary, this literature review on conversion reviews that changes in conversion are cognitive, emotive, and volitional. Cognitive changes in conversion have been address by Prochaska's model of change. Prochaska's first three stages all deal with change on the cognitive level. His fourth stage of change is the action stage in which there is a volitional change. Miller and Rollnick, in their emphasis on motivation, address the volitional changes in a person and reveal that emotions do accelerate change. They can range from one's fear of death, eternity in hell, hatred of God to gratitude for grace, love for God, to hope of glory. Psychotherapist Diana Fosha says, "core effect, or more precisely, core affective experience, refers to our emotional responses when we do not try to mask, block, distort, or severely mute them."²⁵⁰ Fosha believed that core affect was the central agent of change and transformation.

A state of transformation can be achieved through accessing either of two types of core affective experiences: *core emotions* and a *core state*. *Core emotions*, such as anger, joy sadness, fear, and disgust (i.e., categorical emotions), are in a class by themselves... ..*The core state*, a concept introduced and elaborated herein, refers to an altered state of openness and contact, where the individual is deeply in touch with essential aspects of his own experience. The core state is the internal affective holding environment generated by the self.²⁵¹

In commenting on change, Danny Yeung, a physician and clinical counselor, writes, "We must start from where our patients are and move them along the Stages of Change continuum. We need to be mindful of the question: Where is he/she on the Stages of Change journey?"²⁵² The study of conversion and change in the literature review challenges evangelicals to ask a similar question concerning those with whom they are

²⁴⁹ William R. Miller and Stephen Rollnick, *Motivational Interviewing: Preparing People for Change*, 2d ed. (New York: The Guilford Press, 2002), 12.

²⁵⁰ Diana Fosha, *The Transforming Power of Affect: A Model For Accelerated Change* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 15.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

²⁵² Danny Yeung, *Getting to Yes: The ABCs of Changing Problem Behaviors*, March, 2003. Department of Family and Community Medicine, University of Toronto.

sharing the gospel: Where are they in their spiritual journey? How can Christians move them along in the stages of change journey in conversion?

Each of these models of change reveals that change is a complicated process and that conversion is a process that moves the convert towards transformation. The practice of pre-discipleship is a way of moving a person along the change journey in conversion.

The models for change and conversion reveal that pre-discipleship can play a role in conversion process. These psychological and theological models have established that the changes that occur in conversion are seldom dramatic and often gradual and that people come to Christ by different means and at different paces. The fact that it takes time for the majority of people to be converted means that a majority of people need to go through some type of pre-discipleship process before their conversion. Prochaska's model of change called for a preparation stage in which pre-discipleship is ideal at this stage as the beginning in the conversion process towards transformation. Gordon Smith wisely put it when he writes,

We cannot think effectively and biblically about conversion until we take seriously both the possibility of and the call to transformation. This is, properly speaking, the goal of all of the church's life and thus of theological reflection. Conversion therefore is not an end but a beginning; we give it particular attention to encourage the spiritual transformation that is meant to begin.²⁵³

III. Understanding Discipleship

In this section, the review focuses on the nature of discipleship in the last hundred years in an effort to understand the significance of the pre-discipleship of seekers in the discipleship-making process. The review also seeks to discover what the connections, if any, exist between pre-discipleship and discipleship.

At the heart of the Great Commission is the command to "make disciples." Gene Getz points out, "The church therefore exists to carry out two functions — evangelism (to

²⁵³ Gordon T. Smith, *Beginning Well: Christian Conversion and Authentic Transformation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 19–20.

make disciples) and edification (to teach them).”²⁵⁴ Yet, in many churches, discipleship has been reduced to a program, a Sunday school class, or an item on a list of things to do. Leroy Eims, in his 1978 book on discipleship, notes that many North American churchgoers know little about discipleship. He writes, “This concept of multiplying disciples has not been as widely accepted as it is today. At one time, in fact not too long ago, relatively few people were doing it. But many more today are returning to that biblical process.”²⁵⁵

Since Eims’ book was published, a significant number of discipleship movements, materials, programs, and conferences have been developed in North American churches. Many pastors and leaders acknowledge the need for discipleship, and yet it is difficult today to find a North American church model that exemplifies biblical discipleship. Today, nearly thirty years after Eims’ book, discipleship is still not part of the fabric of most churches.

Many factors have been suggested as the reason why discipleship does not play an important role in churches today. One is that Christians are often too busy with meetings, functions, and even ministry to have time for discipleship. Discipleship author Bill Hull points out, “The modern church is more mired in institutionalism than its first-century counterpart. Whereas the early Christian resisted change because he experienced a vibrant, caring environment, today many resist expansion because it threatens their power base.”²⁵⁶

Another reason given for discipleship not playing a significant role in the church is the crisis with authority in today’s postmodern world. Discipleship programs of the past have always worked in an authoritative structure; however, the postmodern generation has a tendency to resist following someone depends on inherent authority. Jimmy Long writes, “Postmodern Xers have no faith in institutions and put little stock in a chain of command. Their respect is earned, not demanded. While not attacking

²⁵⁴ Gene A. Getz, *Sharpening the Focus of the Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 22.

²⁵⁵ Leroy Eims, *The Lost Art of Discipleship Making* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 20.

²⁵⁶ Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1994), 91.

hierarchy directly, they just ignore authority or work around it because as a group they learned to survive in their youth by avoiding conflict.”²⁵⁷

A third reason why discipleship does not play a predominant role in today’s churches may be the pre-discipleship factor. Could it be that one of the reasons why discipleship is rarely practiced because there is no practice of pre-discipleship leading into discipleship?

This section of the literature review first analyzes the meaning of biblical discipleship to develop a common definition of discipleship. Then it looks at the essence of biblical discipleship with a focus on its characteristics and processes and at how Christians today practice discipleship. The review concludes by showing the connections between discipleship and pre-discipleship, revealing the significant role pre-discipleship can have in making disciples.

A. *The Meaning of Biblical Discipleship*

It is imperative to define discipleship because many church leaders have misunderstood it resulting in many inconsistencies in its practice. Some church leaders see discipleship as a didactic spiritual relationship and others view it as a program in the church. The understanding of how to practice discipleship ranges from establishing a mentoring relationship to providing a Sunday school class. A biblical definition of discipleship will assist in eliminating common misunderstandings on the subject and improve in the ministry of discipleship in the church.

The word “disciple” came from the Greek word μαθητής, which means “learner,” “pupil,” or “follower.” It is found over 250 times in the New Testament, mostly in the four gospels. According to Kittel, discipleship is more than a cognitive exercise in learning.

The emphasis is not so much on the incompleteness or even deficiency of education as on the fact that the one thus designated [a disciple] is engaged in learning, that his education consists in the appropriation or

²⁵⁷ Jimmy Long, *Generating Hope: A Strategy for Reaching the Postmodern Generation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 45.

adoption of specific knowledge or conduct, and that it proceeds deliberately and according to a set plan. There is thus no μαθητής without a διδάσκαλος. The process involves a corresponding personal relationship.²⁵⁸

Although some have suggested that making disciples was not an emphasis of the New Testament church because the word μαθητής is no longer found after Acts 21, the concept is present in the New Testament epistles. Bill Hull explains, “The authors of the Epistles develop replacement words or phrases for *disciple*. Example include *believer, brother, Christian, faithful, imitators, saints, the called*. Words used to describe function include *model, practice, train, mature, and example*. To describe the relationship with the world they used *ambassador, alien, and pilgrim*.”²⁵⁹

What is biblical discipleship? The basic understanding in the New Testament is that all believers are disciples of Christ, followers of Jesus. As mentioned in the previous chapter, young Jewish boys grew up wanting to be rabbis, and giving up one’s life to pursue God under the study of a rabbi was accepted behavior. Believers in the early church were known as the “followers of the Way,”²⁶⁰ and “the Way,” as Joseph Fitzmyer points out, is “a name for Christianity.”²⁶¹ Believers in Athens were called “followers of Paul,”²⁶² an indication that they thought in terms of being a disciple of a rabbi. The Corinthian believers were divided in their allegiances, an issue Paul addressed. “My brothers, some from Chloe’s household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, ‘I follow Paul,’ another, ‘I follow Apollos,’ another, ‘I follow Cephas;’ still another, ‘I follow Christ.’”²⁶³ Paul clarified the concept of being a follower by pointing out that we are following Christ and exhorting the Corinthians to “follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.”²⁶⁴ Paul used the word “example” in his letter to the Philippians, “Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave

²⁵⁸ Kittel, 416.

²⁵⁹ Hull, 19.

²⁶⁰ Acts 22:4; 24:14 NIV.

²⁶¹ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 735.

²⁶² Acts 17:34 NIV.

²⁶³ I Cor. 1:11–12 NIV.

²⁶⁴ I Cor. 11:1 NIV.

you.”²⁶⁵ Paul saw himself as the model for following Jesus. He told the Thessalonians, “We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow.”²⁶⁶ The Apostle Peter describe Jesus as an example for people to follow: “To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps.”²⁶⁷ Robert Foster summarizes the meaning of discipleship:

The man or woman who would follow Christ totally must always be a learner, one who is open and teachable. A disciple realizes that he does not have all the answers. This is a crucial area, for we are in great danger if we think we have nothing more to learn in our Christian life. A disciple of Jesus Christ is always willing to learn something new from someone else.²⁶⁸

B. The Essence of Discipleship

The biblical understanding of discipleship provides a basis for reviewing the literature on discipleship to gain an understanding of the essence of discipleship. This essence can be identified by examining both the characteristics of disciples and the processes of discipleship that leaders in the discipleship movement have highlighted as being core to their models. Understanding these characteristics and processes may assist in forming a model of the core essence of pre-discipleship.

1. Characteristics of disciples

One of the ways to understand the essence of discipleship is to study the characteristics of a disciple. To do this, Dawson Trotman, founder of The Navigators, developed a wheel illustration with Christ in the center and the obedient Christian connected to Christ by two vertical spokes of the word and prayer and two horizontal spokes of witnessing and fellowship. The wheel “shows how Christ should be the center of our lives, that we should live in obedience to him, communicate with him through the Word and prayer,

²⁶⁵ Phil. 3:17 NIV.

²⁶⁶ II Thes. 3:9 NIV.

²⁶⁷ I Peter 2:21 NIV.

²⁶⁸ Robert D. Foster, *Essentials of Discipleship* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1982), 16.

and reach out to others through fellowship and witness.”²⁶⁹ This Navigator model has been influential in the development of other models of Christian growth over the years. Others who made important contributions to concepts of discipleship and were in ministry with The Navigators include Richard Foster, Leroy Eims, and Walter Henrichsen.

Foster describes eleven characteristics of a disciple of Jesus Christ: the disciple must 1) be open and teachable becoming a learner; 2) follow Jesus as Lord; 3) live a life of purity; 4) regularly spend time in devotions and prayer; 5) commit himself or herself to the study and meditation of the word of God; 6) see the importance of being a witness of God and engage in evangelism; 7) be highly involved with church and body life; 8) be involved with Christian fellowship; 9) display servanthood in Christ; 10) enjoy the ministry of giving; and 11) display the fruit of the Spirit.

Foster considers these eleven elements to be “the biblical profile of a disciple.” He writes, “Please note that a person who sincerely desires to be a disciple will include these characteristics as part of his or her life, but he or she is not limited to just these eleven. Other biblical characteristics will be part of that person’s life as well.”²⁷⁰

As effective as the Navigator model has been in bringing many towards maturity in Christ, it did not include some important aspects of Christian life. For example, it can be debated whether more spokes in the wheel illustration, such as worship, love, accountability, and holiness, ministry, service, and giving would have strengthened the Navigator model. On the other hand, it could be argued that these additional spokes are included in the four main Navigator spokes. However, discipleship should never be seen as being this simplistic.

Harold Percy, who identifies six elements of discipleship, proposes a model for understanding discipleship using the analogy of food and exercise. Percy writes, “The food we need to nourish us in our spiritual growth is scripture, worship, and community. Our exercise will be prayer, ministry, and stewardship. If we have only food, our growth will not be health; if we have only exercise we will not last. Both food and exercise are required for healthy growth.”²⁷¹ Percy’s food and exercise model covers most of the key

²⁶⁹ Eims, 79.

²⁷⁰ Foster, 14.

²⁷¹ Harold Percy, *Following Jesus: First Steps On The Way* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1993), 8.

aspects of discipleship. However, it reduces discipleship to an individual list of things to do with little emphasis on a mentoring relationship and accountability.

In his model of discipleship, Gary Kuhne uses the concept of faithful men who were candidates to be disciples. He argues that although all who profess faith in Christ are candidates for discipleship, not all who claim to be a Christian are faithful. According to Kuhne, the faithful man is a person who hungers for God's word, thirsts for holy living, desires a greater knowledge of God, commits to the lordship of Christ, desires to be used by God, and has a love for people. Kuhne stresses that "each of these criteria will only be in seed form in the new Christian. Obviously, as a Christian grows in Christ these characteristics will become deeper and more complete. Yet I believe the seeds of such characteristics are discernible, even in a newer Christian's life."²⁷² Although Kuhne describes some of the characteristics of a mature disciple, his picture of a disciple seems more of a goal to be obtained in the discipleship journey than the experience in the journey itself. The essence of discipleship, a disciple's love for God and other people, is seen in the characteristics of disciples shown in each area of growth as mentioned in the discipleship models of Trotman, Foster, Percy, and Kuhne.

2. Process of discipleship

Another way to understand the essence of discipleship is through a study of the discipleship process. Allan Coppedge, who provides a basic model of discipleship, summarizes the discipleship process as being "divided into three essential principles: life-to-life transference, spiritual disciplines, and accountability."²⁷³ Coppedge defines life transference as occurring "when a person shares wisdom, knowledge, experience, and maturity with another."²⁷⁴ He points out that life transference occurs when the disciple maker and the disciple spend time together, expend energy with each other, share in a community, and share life together. This life-to-life transference is the same as the concept of mentoring that is promoted today, which Paul Stanley defines as "a relational

²⁷² Gary W. Kuhne, *The Dynamics of Discipleship Training: Being and Producing Spiritual Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 28–29.

²⁷³ Allan Coppedge, *The Biblical Principles Of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press, 1989), 61.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

experience in which one person empowers another by sharing God given resources.”²⁷⁵ David Watson concurs, pointing out that “no man is an island. Our lives are woven together, so that who we are and what we do always influences other people. The New Testament, therefore, knows nothing of the solitary Christian.”²⁷⁶

The second principle in the discipleship process is, according to Coppedge, the practice of spiritual disciplines, which he defines these as the disciplines of spending time with the word of God, the discipline of Scripture memorization, the discipline of fellowship, the discipline of giving, the discipline of prayer, the discipline of fasting, and the discipline of public worship. Michael Wilkins, who describes these spiritual disciplines as keys to maturity in Christ, point out that “throughout church history, the development of ‘spiritual disciplines’ has been seen to be a key to spiritual growth.”²⁷⁷

The third principle of the discipleship process, according to Coppedge, was the principle of accountability. According to Steven Manskar, who believes in what is called covenant discipleship, “the living out of the relationship with Christ through faithful obedience to God and God’s commandments” highlights the importance of accountability in discipleship²⁷⁸

Accountability is how we make sure our discipleship happens. The primary task of Covenant Discipleship is to give disciples the means to prevent and resist the temptation to self-deception. Watching over one another in love helps disciples stand against the trap of believing and living as though they were self-sufficient (having all that is needed, in and of themselves, to be faithful to Christ’s call). Mutual accountability prevents us from believing there is no need to “work out [our] own salvation” (Philippians 2:12). Covenant Discipleship also helps people resist the temptation to think they can be disciples when they feel like it, when it is convenient, when it feels good.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁵ Paul D. Stanley and J. Robert Clinton, *Connecting: The Mentoring Relationship You Need to Succeed in Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1992), 38.

²⁷⁶ David Watson, *Discipleship* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1982), 243.

²⁷⁷ Michael J. Wilkins, *Following The Master: Discipleship in the Steps of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 135.

²⁷⁸ Steven W. Manskar, *Accountable Discipleship: Living In God’s Household* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2000), 23.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 23–24.

Accountability in discipleship is intentional, personal, and specific. It is intentional in the sense that some people enter into a discipleship covenant to establish responsibilities and boundaries in accountability. Some small groups make group covenants to emphasize members' commitment to each other in the discipleship process. Matt Friedeman affirms that "the group covenant outlines the mutually agreed-upon purpose, goals, and commitments of the group, as well as establishing a format for the weekly meetings."²⁸⁰

Although the emphasis and dynamics of the discipleship models developed by Navigators, Percy, Kuhne, and Coppedge vary from model to model, there are commonalities among them. The literature reveals that following factors are necessary in the discipleship process. One factor is a mentoring relationship involving some aspect of teaching and accountability because effective discipleship cannot take place apart from nurturing, intimate, and accountable relationships. A second necessary factor is the practice of the spiritual disciplines of worship, the study and internalizing of Scripture, prayer, fasting, purity, and fellowship. The third factor of discipleship is the context of ministry. Ministry such as loving, giving, service, and being a witness for Christ are practical expressions of discipleship. Each one of these factors is at the core the essence of discipleship.

C. The Practice of Discipleship

One reason that making disciples has been a difficult for the local church in the last hundred years is the lack of effective models. The following section will first describe the limitations of trying to adapt models used for students in the church. Then it will examine two traditional approaches to the practice of discipleship, the one-on-one approach and the small group approach, identifying their impact and finally examine a third model that could result from combining these two methods in a matrix.

²⁸⁰ Matt Friedeman, *Accountability Connection* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1992), 157.

1. Student ministry model

With discipleship ministry being driven by campus ministry organizations such as Navigators and Campus Crusade for Christ, many of the models of discipleship were originally developed for the student world. However, that zeal for and practice of discipleship did not transfer to the believers in the local churches. The methods that para-church organizations have used effectively among student have not fit well in church settings because the audiences are so different. The strategy for discipling students, who have similar backgrounds, is vastly different from that needed in the local church where people vary markedly in age, interest, background, and social differences. Similarly, student ministries disciple mostly single people, while the church faces the challenge of discipling those who are married or divorced, those who have young children, and who are young children or youth. As well, para-church models for discipleship are also often inadequate for the church because they fail to lead believers towards engaging in the ordinances and sacraments in the church community.

In an effort to develop a practical model for discipleship in the local church, the church has taken two philosophical approaches resulting in two traditional organizational structures for discipleship in local churches: one-on-one mentoring and small groups. Both approaches have their strengths and limitations.

2. One-on-one approach

The one-on-one model involves a mentor and a protégé, ideally, who like Paul and Timothy in the New Testament, form an intimate relationship for life. It is the basic structure for intensive discipleship and ideally done on an individual basis. Navigators promoted a concept, which many others have embraced, that by discipling one person a year, and doubling the number of disciples each year, the entire population of the Earth could be disciplined in thirty-three years. Messianic Rabbi David Hargis writes, “The discipleship process of Yeshua is not based on immediate gratification. Yet in one

lifetime, through *one-by one* discipleship, the entire earth can easily be reached with the truth of God's Messiah and God's commandments.”²⁸¹

While the one-on-one model has benefits for discipling certain individuals, it has limited effectiveness in a church setting because it may not meet the range of needs in the congregation. The one-on-one discipleship process is also too slow to use in the context of the local church.

The lack of results indicate that this mentoring method has limited effectiveness in reaching the world on the scale supporters have claimed it could. While advocates boast that the world can be won in thirty-three years through one-on-one discipleship, the reality is that this theory has been promoted for more than fifty years and the world is not close to being discipled. A different approach to discipleship in the church seems to be needed

3. Small group approach

The main model used for small group discipleship is Jesus' three-year relationship with his twelve disciples. Henry Cloud and John Townsend argue that the small group is the best vehicle to bring a disciple to maturity and write concerning stagnant Christians, “When people who have been stuck find themselves involved in a small group that is actually doing the things the Bible says to do in that context, life change occurs that has never occurred before.”²⁸² Author and church growth consultant Carl George argues for the effectiveness of small groups, saying he is “convinced that the kind of group that does the best job of ‘keeping’ people is the mouse-size home-cell group.”²⁸³ Bill Hull argues that “effective discipling must take place in a small-group setting. It provides intimacy; a variety of gifts, without an overwhelming atmosphere; and an ideal training vehicle for reproduction. It teaches well, provides accountability, and can become the launching pad for large group activities.”²⁸⁴

²⁸¹ David Hargis, “The Power of Discipleship” www.messianic.com/articles/discipleship.htm, accessed January 7, 2005.

²⁸² Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Making Small Groups Work* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 29.

²⁸³ Carl F. George, *Prepare Your Church For The Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1992), 74.

²⁸⁴ Hull, 214.

A leading advocate of the cell-church movement, Joel Comiskey, believes that the cell group is the backbone or center of church ministry. Comiskey argues that the cell church should replace the institutionalized church because it is more effective in discipleship. He writes, “Cell ministry replaces the need for many traditional programs. I like to use the phrase, *the cell-driven church*, because church growth success is primarily measured through infrastructure growth as the church grows from the core to the crowd.”²⁸⁵

Ralph Neighbour, a strong advocate of cell churches, believes this non-traditional structure creates the community for New Testament discipleship and church life.

Cell churches are the only way that true community can be experienced by all Christians. It is not a “purest dream” to suggest the church should structure itself around this truth. Rather, it is a return to a life style which has been bastardized by centuries of unbiblical, crusted traditions. The cell group is not just a portion of church life, to be clustered with a dozen other organizations. It is church life; and when it properly exists, all other competing structures are neither needed nor valid.²⁸⁶

While the cell-church movement is accurate on many counts in its criticism of the traditional church, it has its own limitations because, its solution to the lack of New Testament discipleship is one of infrastructure and organization instead of spirituality. To limit spiritual growth to the confines of a cell group is to put boundaries on the Spirit who moves through a variety of means and vehicles.

Both the one-on-one approach and the small group approach have had some success in creating disciples; however, another approach seems to be needed to make disciples the world. Jim Peterson describes the success of current approaches: “Thirty years of discipleship programs, and we are not discipled.”²⁸⁷ This means that the church needs to begin to understand discipleship making in a different way.

²⁸⁵ Joel Comiskey, *Cell Church Solutions*, photocopy of manuscript by author, submitted to CCS Publishing, September 13, 2004.

²⁸⁶ Ralph W. Neighbour Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here?* (Houston: Touch Publications, 1990), 112–113.

²⁸⁷ Jim Petersen, *Lifestyle Discipleship* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1993), 15.

4. Matrix approach

Since various models of discipleship have strengths and weakness, it is not useful for churches to view the process of discipleship as being an either/or proposition of one-on-one discipleship versus the small group discipleship. Scripture itself embraces both and allows for other forms. Rather, discipleship can be better understood in the form of a discipleship matrix that embraces every approach that draws believers to maturity.

The discipleship matrix is not a program, but a philosophy. It recognizes that relationships, programs, environments, cultures, experiences, and the life in the church all contribute to a disciple's growth and maturity. The matrix identifies the many types of ministry and relationships in a church that can contribute to developing disciples.

The first component of discipleship in the local church involves everyone in the congregational community helping each other to mature in Christ. The community aspect is a characteristic of the New Testament church: one description of it says that "all the believers were together."²⁸⁸ The early church recognized that members of the body of Christ helped one another in their spiritual journeys and the New Testament emphasizes believers' responsibility towards "one another."

A second component of discipleship in the local church would be gender specific: men helping men and women helping women. This is a useful approach because the most effective discipleship occurs when the leader and group members of a small group or those in a mentoring relationship are of the same gender. Gender-specific ministries often remove barriers created by culture or generation. The Apostle Paul told Timothy, "Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity."²⁸⁹

Ministries such as Promise Keepers and Women Alive have played a large role in the maturing growth of the believer in the local church. Promise Keepers notes that "revival and discipleship are the two elements that became the foundation and focus of Promise Keepers."²⁹⁰ Women Alive claims that they "desire to see women 'Alive in

²⁸⁸ Acts 2:44 NIV.

²⁸⁹ I Tim 5:1–2 NIV.

²⁹⁰ Promise Keepers, "The History of Promise Keepers," <http://www.promisekeepers.org/about/pkhistory>, accessed February 18, 2005.

Christ,' vibrant, positive, affirming, life-giving women who allow the life of Christ to affect every area of their lives and impact the world around them."²⁹¹ churches must not ignore gender-specific ministries because these ministries play a significant role in discipleship today.

A third component of discipleship in the local church happens in cell groups, the place in which strongest and most intense relationships are formed and caring is practiced. Carl George writes, "Primary nurturative care-mutual care of peers encouraging and serving one another requires a cell-level context."²⁹² The caring relationships that develop in the cell groups naturally evolve into learning relationships with one another over time. The first church in Jerusalem not only met in the temple courts but members met in cells in their homes. "Everyday they continued to meet together in temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people."²⁹³ Cells can be established to meet a variety of needs such as prayer, Bible study, and outreach. Ideally, each cell should function on all levels of ministry; but practically speaking many cells have their own signature of ministry. All cells, though, should function in the area of caring.

A fourth component of discipleship in the local church is one-on-one relationship. One component of discipleship growth involves sharing information with others as one continues to learn through intellectual, emotional, social, and accountable relationships. Within cell groups, a variety of individual relationships are established and they result in one of three kinds of discipleship occurring: passive, occasional, or intensive. Passive discipleship occurs between two individuals when one learns and grows from the other or vice versa without any active plan to connect individually. Occasional discipleship happens when individuals meet occasionally to help each other grow in Christ. Intensive discipleship occurs when two individuals meet together for discipleship on a regular basis. All these discipleship connections mostly come in the form of a mentor-protégé relationship. Leroy Eims writes, "A ministry of multiplication does not come from an attempt to mass produce disciples. There must be individual, personal time with each

²⁹¹ Women Alive, "About Us," <http://www.womenalive.org/aboutus.php>, February 18, 2005.

²⁹² Carl F. George, *Prepare Your Church For The Future*, 126–129.

²⁹³ Acts 2:46–47 NIV.

person with whom you are working and whom you are training.”²⁹⁴ Paul often encouraged Timothy to carry on these relationships in the local church. “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.”²⁹⁵

The discipleship matrix recognizes that the church that makes disciples must establish an environment for spiritual growth through its community, men’s and women’s groups, cell groups, and individual relationships. It must practice a philosophy that sees all ministries as part of the disciple-making process. The discipleship matrix is also consistent with pedagogical systems of adult learning, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

In conclusion, the literature on discipleship indicates that disciple of Christ is a learner, a follower of Jesus who is always willing to obey. The disciple is open and teachable. Discipleship engages believers in mentoring relationships that involve accountability. It also involves spiritual disciplines includes worship, prayer, and study of the word, often in the context of ministry. It can be and is best understood in its practice in a matrix of approaches embracing the church community, gender-specific ministry, cell groups, and one-on-one relationships.

D. Connection between Discipleship and Pre-Discipleship

The previous review of literature on the elements of discipleship and on approaches to making disciples reveals that there is a significant role for pre-discipleship as preparation for discipleship. It also reveals where connections exist between pre-discipleship and making disciples and why the church can implement pre-discipleship as part of discipleship development.

One connection between pre-discipleship and discipleships can be seen in characteristics shared by pre-disciples and disciples. Both are followers of Christ: disciples are followers of Christ who learns from Him, while pre-disciples are learners who seek to follow Him. The essence, the characteristics and process, that makes a

²⁹⁴ Eims, 102.

²⁹⁵ II Tim. 2:2 NIV.

disciple, parallels the essence that makes a pre-disciple. Although pre-disciples do not have the fully matured character of disciples, they have the potential to develop the characteristics of a disciple. Kuhne's description of "faithful men" describes the characteristics of a mature disciple but he affirms that the characteristics of a young disciple are "in seed form in the new Christian."²⁹⁶ Although a seeker may have a hunger for God and his word and desire to live a holy life, it is only in the seed form of a magnificent characteristic of something beautiful when matured.

The factors that are necessary in making disciples are similar to important aspects of pre-discipleship processes. The spiritual disciplines of studying the Scripture and of worship, and the desire for the discipline of holiness are part of pre-discipleship. The ministry of love, giving, and service could all be vital aspects in pre-discipleship. Sometimes seekers are engaged in a voluntary activity as a humanitarian service to the community; however, as they begin to discover God, they begin to discover his purpose through humanitarian activities and thus discover his ministry. While seekers may not experience these factors as deeply as a believer might, the overall experience helps move the unbeliever along in the conversion process.

From a methodological perspective, pre-discipleship training could readily be conducted in most church because, like discipleship making, it functions best in mentoring and accountability relationships. As well, pre-discipleship can be done on a variety of levels: the community level, at a cell level, or on an individual level. The mentoring relationship that is so effective for Christians can also be used with those who are not yet believers. Spiritual disciplines are part of the process of pre-discipleship. The accountability and the ministry of love, giving, and service could all be vital aspects of pre-discipleship.

As well, pre-discipleship can help the churches fulfill the mandate of the Great Commission to make disciples, because it leads churches into the kind of relationship in which they are making disciples. Walter Henrichsen writes, "Being a disciple begins with a proper relationship to Jesus Christ and having on your heart what is on His. Making disciples begins with evangelism."²⁹⁷ As shown earlier, pre-discipleship is an excellent

²⁹⁶ Kuhne, 29.

²⁹⁷ Walter A. Henrichsen, *Disciples Are Made Not Born* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1994), 52.

way to do evangelism because in the process, Jesus is introduced to unbelievers through a search in the Scriptures. Once again, pre-discipleship makes discipleship a priority in evangelism.

IV. Summary of the Literature Review

In conclusion, the literature review on evangelism, conversion, and discipleship supports the need for the church to take a fresh approach to making disciples. The review on evangelism shows that many of today's evangelistic efforts are ineffective and that the church needs an alternative approach, which opens the door for using pre-discipleship. The review on conversion shows that for the majority of believers conversion is more a gradual process than a dramatic single event and yet many evangelistic methods are based on dramatic conversions. The need to allow time for the changes that result in transformation means that pre-discipleship, which provides time for change to occur, has a place in the conversion process. The review on discipleship shows that a discipleship relationship can be developed from a pre-discipleship relationship. The investigation of the essence of and approaches to discipleship provides insight on the essence and approaches of pre-discipleship.

Pre-discipleship is part of the work of the evangelist and can fill a need as the church moves from encounter evangelism to process evangelism. Pre-discipleship is the catechumenal study needed in contemporary evangelism. It fits well into the conversion process because it can be used as one of the means among many that God uses to change people. The review shows that there is a place for pre-discipleship, a process in evangelism that resonates with the process of conversion leading into discipleship.

Chapter Four: Pre-Discipleship and Adult Education

Because pre-discipleship is a form of adult education, a study of adult education is beneficial in providing an understanding of how seekers can best learn in a pre-discipleship process. This chapter will examine whether pre-discipleship has a place in adult religious education and seek to identify effective approaches to the practice of pre-discipleship. To do so, it will look at the history of Christian education, theories of learning, principles of adult religious education, goals of religious education, and the practice of adult Christian education, and how they relate to the practice of pre-discipleship. The chapter answers the question: *How can the educational process of pre-discipleship best be conducted to enhance proper conversion and discipleship?*

The author acknowledges that there are overlaps in the discussions of the principles, goals, and methods in Christian education. The section on principles deals with the content of Christian education. It answers the question, “What are the issues in Christian adult education?” The section on goals conveys the direction for Christian education. It answers the question, “Where is Christian education heading?” The section on the practice of Christian education responds to the question, “How can we best practice Christian education?”

I. The History of Christian Education

Christian education began early in church history, and evidence reveals that the church has historically used education to teach seekers about the Christian faith. This is significant because it means that pre-discipleship is not a recent concept but has roots in

the New Testament church and a legitimate place in churches' Christian education program today. To prepare adult seekers, the early church used the catechumenate to systematically instruct them on the biblical, theological, and doctrinal aspects of the faith as a means of integrating converts into the church. Leon McKenzie and Michael Harton describe the comprehensive nature of the catechumenate:

The church's encouragement of lifelong learning is evidenced in the model for learning called the catechumenate. Very early in Christian history an initiatory process for converts to Christianity was assimilated from the pagan mystery religious and Essenian practices. Those who wished to enter the Christian community were required to live in the community for an extended period of time. During this time the catechumen was to learn the ways of the community. At the end of a prescribed time period, a decision was made by leaders of the community (on the basis of the catechumen's acceptance of Christian ways) to permit or forbid further entrance into fellowship. In carefully graded steps the catechumen became incorporated into the community. Biblical knowledge was revealed to the catechumen; he was instructed in moral, social, and liturgical practices. Even after he was admitted into full fellowship through baptism, the new Christian was expected to continue his study of the Scriptures and commentaries on the Scriptures.²⁹⁸

The process was not rushed. Harold Burgess notes that "the period of preparation for the catechumen to become a full communicant member was about three years."²⁹⁹ The church used the catechumenate to conduct adult education during its first four centuries, a period that produced educators such as Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Cyril of Jerusalem, Chrysostom, and Augustine, and education was highly influenced by the Jewish and Greco-Roman culture.

Early Christian thought on education was strongly affected by the cultural assumptions of the Jewish and Greco-Roman worlds; these worlds were not always in concordance. Jewish education was thoroughly religious in the explicit sense of the term. Scribes learned to read and write in order to prepare themselves for lifetimes of serious study of the Torah, Mishnah, and Talmud. All education was ordained directly to theological and explicitly religious themes. Greco-Roman education, on the other hand,

²⁹⁸ Leon McKenzie and R. Michael Harton, *The Religious Education of Adults* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing Inc., 2002), 32–33.

²⁹⁹ Harold W. Burgess, *Models of Religious Education* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Publishing House, 2001), 35–36.

was broadly humanistic and explicitly religious values were not taught. Mythology was not studied as religious doctrine but for literary purposes. The study of art, rhetoric, music, philosophy, and literature was an end in itself. This difference in orientation toward education was argued thoroughly by fathers of the early church.³⁰⁰

Then during the fifth to the fifteenth centuries, Christian education changed from a focus on teaching seekers to training for monks and others who would serve the church, and so the benefits of the catechumenate were lost. The “catechumenal instruction prior to baptism of adult converts was reduced to a ceremonial ritual enacted on behalf of infants at their baptism.”³⁰¹ Christian education changed during those centuries because of the influence of a range of scholars: in the sixth century, Gregory the Great saw secular learning as unnecessary for Christians, while from the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, Anselm, Peter Abelard, Peter Lombard, and Thomas Aquinas, combined religious and secular education, philosophy, and theology to benefit the church and the community. Adult Christian education during the Middle Ages evolved to the point where seekers likely had difficulty learning about the faith, and teaching on the faith was restricted mainly to members of monastic communities and to the nobility.

As Western Europe began to radically change in the sixteenth century, a thirst for knowledge and education grew. A growing nationalism meant that people were less willing to submit to a distant pope, while an increased interest in ancient Greek and Roman art and literature fueled the flames of the Renaissance. Those changes, along with anger over the corruption in the church and disagreements over church leadership and doctrine, led to the Reformation. This period saw a growth in public education, a development of catechisms for teaching converts to the Christian faith, and an increasing interest in studying the Bible with respect to its authority in faith and practice. Many of the Reformers embraced the role of education, resulting in education being made more widely available. It was said that Martin Luther believed “the right kind of schools . . . would not only prepare individuals for the tasks of industry and government, but they would accomplish the great goal of teaching every Christian to read the Bible.”³⁰² During

³⁰⁰ Mckenzie and Harton, 35–36.

³⁰¹ Michael J. Anthony ed., *Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-first Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 20.

³⁰² Burgess, 51.

the Reformation, other influential educators such as Calvin, Zwingli, and John Knox among the Protestants and Ignatius of Loyola among the Catholics contributed to the renewed interest in learning with their examinations of Scripture and theological teaching.

The seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries ushered in the years of the Enlightenment, when individualism, pietism, revivalism, and industrialization had significant impact on the world and Christian education. The pursuit of knowledge was widely embraced and the desire for the knowledge of God was common. In this era, educators such as Philipp Jacob Spener, a German Pietist, August Herman Francke, a student of Spener, and Nikolaus Ludwig Zinzendorf, the founder of the Moravians, helped revitalize catechetical instruction so that it could focus on a genuine spiritual experience with God and not just a memorization of a creed.³⁰³

John Wesley, founder of the Methodist movement, was influenced by the Moravians in his views on education. He helped established schools for children for spiritual instruction and was one of the first religious leaders to establish a Sunday school as part of his ministry. He saw the connection between evangelism and education: “For Wesley, education was not secondary to evangelism, it was bound together with it. Methodist preachers were charged to ‘diligently and earnestly instruct the children’ and to make a place for them to grow within the Methodist societal structure.”³⁰⁴

During the twentieth century, Christian education became more institutionalized. When the role of religious instruction in public education diminished, Christian education for children began moving from the public school arena into the religious school arena. Religious training institutions were also established for adults: “The missions’ movement of the late 1800s encouraged the development of Bible institutes and colleges for training young adults to evangelize and disciple others in the faith.”³⁰⁵ Most Christian educational programs ended up specializing in training Christians to live out their faith in the world. In the last century, the growing emphasis on adult education resulted in the growth of adult religious education programs. In spite of that change, little, if any, pre-discipleship is taught as a part of adult Christian education.

³⁰³ Anthony, 22.

³⁰⁴ Burgess, 61–62.

³⁰⁵ Anthony, 24.

In summary, pre-discipleship was widely practiced throughout church history, beginning with the catechumenate in the early church as a means to integrate converts into the church. Although it was rarely practiced during the Middle Ages, catechisms were written again during the Reformation to teach converts to the Christian faith. During the Enlightenment, education in the church among the Moravians and Wesleyans was an integral aspect of evangelism. The history of religious education in the church supports the practice of pre-discipleship, even though it has been forgotten in the education of today.

II. The Theories of Learning

This section will examine five major theories that have influenced adult learning: behaviorist orientation, cognitive orientation, humanist orientation, social learning orientation, and constructivism. The purpose is to understand how adults gain knowledge and to gain insights that will assist in understanding pre-discipleship from an educational perspective

The behaviorist theory of learning regards the learning process as a change in behavior and describes the purpose of education as being to produce behavioral change in a desired direction. The method focuses on measuring aspects of human behavior in the context of stimuli and responses. Recognized Behaviorism theorists such as Edwin Ray Guthrie, Clark Leonard Hull, Ivan Pavlov, B. F. Skinner, Edward Thorndike, Edward Chace Tolman, and John Watson, believed that behavior is connected to positive or negative external reinforcements. Skinner understood personality as a “repertoire of behavior imported by an organized set of contingencies.”³⁰⁶ In other words, people learn and form their characters as a result of their environment. The behaviorist orientation can assist in establishing behavioral objectives, skill development, and training in adult learning and has relevance in terms of setting behavioral goals in pre-discipleship.

In contrast, the cognitive orientation to learning regards learning as an internal mental process that involves insight, data processing, memory, and perception. Its purpose of education is to develop the capacity and skills to learn better. Leaders of the

³⁰⁶ B.F. Skinner, *About Behaviorism* (New York: Knopf, 1974), 149.

cognitivist camp like David Ausubel, Jerome Bruner, Robert Gagné, Kurt Koffka, Wolfgang Köhler, Kurt Lewin, and Jean Piaget, believed that perception, insight, and meaning are keys to learning. Cognitivists would say that the mind is always learning and actively processing information. They believe that “the human mind is not simply a passive exchange-terminal system where the stimuli arrive and the appropriate response leaves. Rather, the thinking person interprets sensations and gives meaning to the events that impinge upon his consciousness.”³⁰⁷ This learning theory encourages adults to learn how to learn recognizing their ability to process and retrieve information as they age. This orientation has significance to addressing the internal mental structure of a seeker in pre-discipleship.

The humanist orientation developed by Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers regards the learning process as a personal act to fulfill potential, and the purpose of education as a means to become self-actualized and autonomous. Rogers identified the following characteristics of learning:

1. *Personal involvement*: the affective and cognitive aspects of a person should be involved in the learning event.
2. *Self-initiated*: a sense of discovery must come from within.
3. *Pervasive*: the learning makes a difference in the behavior, the attitudes, perhaps even the personality of the learner.
4. *Evaluated by the learner*: the learner can best determine whether the experience is meeting a need.
5. *Essence is meaning*: when experiential learning takes place, its meaning to the learner becomes incorporated into the total experience.³⁰⁸

This humanistic orientation leads to a clearer understanding of andragogy, the art and science of helping adults learn, and of models of self-directed learning in the adult learner. A case can be made that the seeker in the pre-discipleship process is a self-directed learner.

The social learning orientation sees the learning process as an interaction with and observation of others in a social context. Proponents of this theory are Albert Bandura

³⁰⁷ P. Grippin and S. Peters, *Learning Theory and Learning Outcomes: The Connection*, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984), 76.

³⁰⁸ Carl R. Rogers, *Freedom to Learn for the 80s*, (Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill, 1983), 20.

and Julian Rotter, who see the purpose of education as being to model new roles and behavior for the learner. Bandura believed that learning from observation is cognitive and vicarious. He writes, “Virtually all learning phenomena resulting from direct experiences can occur on a vicarious basis through observation of other people’s behavior and its consequences for the observer.”³⁰⁹ This learning theory manifests itself in social roles and mentoring in adult learning when learners observe their leader’s interactions in a social context. Social learning is evident in the case of a seeker of faith who is observing and learning from Christians’ behavior, an important aspect of the pre-discipleship process.

Constructivism sees the learning process as a construction of meaning from experience. The leading constructivists, Jean Piaget, P.C. Candy, John Dewey, Jean Lave, B. Rogoff, Ernst von Glasersfeld, and Lev Vygotsky, believed the purpose of education is for learners to construct new knowledge from their experiences. “Meaning is made by the individual and is dependent on the individual’s previous and current knowledge structure. Learning is thus an internal cognitive activity.”³¹⁰ The constructivist theory does not espouse a particular pedagogy, but allows students to learn and come up with their own understanding depending upon their background and experiences. The constructivist model explains why students can come to their own conclusions through the process of pre-discipleship.

In summary, these five major theories of learning all have significance in identifying qualities that need to be in pre-discipleship programs. The behaviorist orientation addresses the need for a behavior goal; in theological terms, this behavior goal should be considered as “repentance.” The cognitive orientation addresses the need for pre-discipleship to contain elements that appeal to the intellect and enable the seeker to gain insight, information, and perceptions about Christianity. The humanist orientation identifies the importance of respecting the seeker in the pre-discipleship process. The rise of andragogy and self-directed learning allows the pre-discipleship process to be less dependent on the teacher. The social learning orientation speaks to the need of modeling and of mentorship in pre-discipleship. One-on-one settings and group settings provide

³⁰⁹ Albert Bandura, *Modeling Theory*, in *Learning Systems, Models, and Theories*, W. S. Sahakian ed., 2nd ed. (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1976), 392.

³¹⁰ Sharan B. Merriam and Rosemary S. Caffarella, *Learning in Adulthood: A Comprehensive Guide*, 2d ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 262.

healthy environments for the interaction that enable seekers to learn about Christ. The constructivist theory indicates that pre-discipleship can be experienced in a variety of ways; allowing for this enables seekers to come to their own conclusions about Christ. Each one of these learning theories contributes to understanding of how adults learn and to a pedagogical understanding of pre-discipleship.

III. The Principles of Adult Religious Education

Since this study is focusing on educating the adult seeker in the basics of Christianity, it will next investigate how adults would learn best by examining the principles of effective adult education. This section addresses the questions “What are the issues in adult education and how do they apply to pre-discipleship?” Nancy Foltz, a leading authority on adult learning, has identified ten basic principles concerning the adult learner.³¹¹

The first three principles relate to the physical health of the adult learners and how it affects their abilities to respond appropriately during learning. First, the capacity to learn does not necessarily decline with age, but natural losses in hearing and sight can affect the learning process. Second, the loss of hearing can contribute to other problems such as a loss of accuracy of information received, a loss of self-confidence and security, a change in interpersonal relations, and adjustments to using supportive devices. Third, the accuracy of response is not necessarily affected by age, but the speed of response is. These three principles indicate that some adults do have physical limitations that affect their ability to learn and that they all learn at different paces. Foltz pointed out that “rushing the adult learner can be nonproductive. Allowing adults time for to complete their learning increases their sense of confidence. Always rushing and moving right along may not result in quality thinking and work.”³¹² Foltz’s comment here concerning process supports the concept of providing the time in evangelistic outreach that some people need for coming to faith, something that the pre-discipleship process does.

³¹¹ Nancy T. Foltz ed., *Handbook of Adult Religious Education* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1986), 45–53.

³¹² *Ibid.*, 47.

According to Foltz, the fourth principle concerning adult learners is that they learn best when they are not under stress. Foltz writes, “When unemployment and marriage conflicts arise adults experience stress and need additional supports to sustain emotional and psychological strength.”³¹³ This principle means that pre-discipleship should not be practice without first addressing the basic needs of the adult learner. When physical needs of food, shelter, clothing, and health and the emotional needs, such as healthy relationships are unmet, this can distract from learning. This means that in outreach, it best to meet the basic needs of an individual before engaging in any form of pre-discipleship.

The fifth principle concerning the adult learner is that time is valuable to them; they enter learning environments on a voluntary basis and are very aware of the factors of time. Patricia Cross and A. Zusman identify a “lack of time” as the number one barrier to participation to learning. Cross writes, “The major barriers of lack of time and, to a lesser extent, costs are actually complex barriers in which the message is that participation in educational activities is not as high in priority as other things that adults might wish to do or to spend their money on at this stage in their lives.”³¹⁴ Adults have no interest in wasting time and therefore any pre-discipleship process must be mindful of this. The time factor was one reason for including only seven lessons in *7 Discoveries*. More adults will commit more readily to seven weeks of study than to fifteen weeks of study, which Alpha, for example, requires.

The sixth principle is that the adult learner is problem-centered rather than subject-centered, as indicated by the sales of millions of “how-to” books, which identify a problem and offer a series of steps for reaching a solution. Adults are motivated to learn in order to resolve problems, whether the problem is fixing a marriage, house, or a problem in their life. Foltz writes, “Effective adult religious education brings together the needs of the adults with creative ways to discuss and resolve those needs.”³¹⁵ In light of this principle, pre-discipleship is more appealing to seekers when it addresses their felt needs and answers their questions, such as “How can I know for sure that God exists?”

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ K. Patricia Cross, *Adults as Learners: Increasing Participation and Facilitating Learning*, (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1981), 146.

³¹⁵ Foltz, 50.

“How can I know God?” “How can I know for sure that the Bible is the word of God?”
“How can I understand the Bible?” “How can I be sure about who is Jesus?” “How can I
find true love?” “How can I deal with my sin?”

The seventh principle is that adult learners are self-directed. Self-directed learning is self-planned and done at the learners’ pace and in their style of learning. Anne Poonwassie, a practitioner in adult education, writes, “It has become clear that learning takes place anywhere and at any time, far beyond adults’ planned and organized educational experiences, and the development of self-directed learning has become a priority and ‘a prerequisite for living in this new world.’”³¹⁶ Self-directed learners are naturally motivated. Author Gary Dickinson writes, “Intrinsic sources of motivation derive from within the individual and include curiosity, the desire to master a subject, need for achievement, and striving for knowledge for its own sake.”³¹⁷ Patricia Cross states, “the explosion of knowledge means that almost all professionals are self-directed learners; but most are also spending increasing amounts of time in a wide variety of organized learning activities.”³¹⁸ This principle has significant implications for pre-discipleship in that those engaged in the practice are seekers motivated to learn about Christianity and can engage in pre-discipleship through self-study at their own pace.

The eighth principle of adult learning is that adult learners are interested in immediate application of learning. Author Alan Knox writes, “Usually participants want to apply or use what they learn in order to strengthen their performance in one or more adult life roles.”³¹⁹ This principle means that pre-discipleship must be relevant and applicable to the seeker. Information that has no bearing upon a seeker’s life is of little value.

The ninth principle concerning the adult learner is that some adult learners are goal-oriented, some learning-oriented, and some are activity-oriented. Different adults have different motives for learning because of differences in their brains and they way

³¹⁶ Anne Poonwassie, “Facilitating Adult Education: A Practitioner’s Perspective,” eds. Deo H. Poonwassie and Anne Poonwassie, *Fundamentals of Adult Education* (Toronto, ON: Thompson Educational Publishing, Inc., 2001), 152.

³¹⁷ Gary Dickinson, *Teaching Adults: A Handbook for Instructors*, (Toronto, ON: New Press, 1973), 40.

³¹⁸ Cross, 30.

³¹⁹ Alan B. Knox, *Helping Adults Learn* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1990), 188.

they process information. Marlene LeFever identifies four styles of learners: imaginative learners, analytic learners, common sense learners, and dynamic learners. An understanding of how different people learn can be used to inform the pre-discipleship process:

Not only is each person most comfortable in a particular style, but each style benefits the whole learning process. Imaginative learners help answer the question, “Why do I need this?” They enjoy talking and sharing their life experiences. Without them, other students may not grasp the personal value of what will be taught. Analytic learners help answer the question, “What does the Bible say about my need?” They enjoy learning new facts and concepts. Without them, other students may not build an intellectual understanding of the Bible. Common sense learners help answer the question, “How does what the Bible teaches actually work?” They enjoy experimenting. Without them, other students may not practice how biblical values work today. Dynamic learners help answer the question, “Now, how will I use what I have learned?” They enjoy finding creative ways to put faith into action. Without them, other students may not discover a “practical” faith.³²⁰

Since adults tend to learn in different ways, pre-discipleship programs need to be fluid in adapting to the learning processes of the seekers. This means that while the pre-discipleship content can remain the same, its presentation must be adjusted to the learning styles of the seekers. Creativity in presentation is important in pre-discipleship. LeFever comments, “Christians are not always view as creative people, either by ourselves or the secular world. We tend to limit ourselves and what we are able to do with the talents and gifts God has given.”³²¹

LeFever also encourages teachers to learn how the creative process works. She writes, “Knowing what happens in these steps can keep us from making mistakes that limit our creativity or becoming frustrated because things aren’t happening the way we think they should, as we sweat and strain toward our goal. The steps in the process are: (1) Preparation, (2) Incubation, (3) Illumination, (4) Elaboration, and (5) Verification.”³²²

³²⁰ Marlene D. LeFever, *Learning Styles: Reaching Everyone God Gave You To Teach* (Paris, ON: David C. Cook Publishing Co., 1995), 16.

³²¹ Marlene D. LeFever, *Creative Teaching Methods* (Weston, ON: David C. Cook Publishing Co., 1985), 21.

³²² *Ibid.*, 25.

The process of pre-discipleship can best be presented in a creative manner adapted to the learning style of each seeker. For example, the pre-disciple process with an analytic learner will focus more on data and facts, while with a dynamic learner it will have more emphasis on application. Pre-discipleship cannot be rigid in presentation, but must be fluid, adapting to the adult seekers' learning styles and what motivates them.

The tenth principle of the adult learner is that the adult can construct an expanded perception of the world. Adults who grasp spiritual truths can begin to understand the relevancy of those truths to the world and their global ramifications. This principle of learning may have more significance to the truths of missions than for the seeker in pre-discipleship.

In summary, nine out of Nancy Foltz's ten principles of the adult learner have relevance to pre-discipleship because they provide valuable insight on how pre-discipleship needs to be practiced in the world. Understanding the principles related to physical limitations, stress, time, problem solving, self-direction, immediate application, motivation, and global perspectives is important for effective adult learning and pre-discipleship.

IV. The Goals in Christian Education

The section on the history of Christian education has established that educating adults in the basics of Christianity has historical precedent, while the last two sections identified pedagogical support for pre-discipleship in theories of learning and principles of adult religious education. This section now examines valid goals for Christian education and how they apply to pre-discipleship because goals influence the development of programs.

Jack Seymour identifies four primary themes in Christian education, which could be used to set direction and goals: "(1) the mission of the church in the world, (2) the role of the faith community, (3) the understanding of the person, and (4) the place of

instruction.”³²³ Seymour also developed the four themes into four approaches to Christian education: transformation, faith community, spiritual growth, and religious instruction.

Seymour identifies one goal in Christian education as social transformation, a process involving radical change and crisis, and spiritual transformation, which begins at conversion. Daniel Schipani writes that the “Christian faith must play a role in the transformation of society and culture.”³²⁴ If the goal of Christian education is social transformation then one way this can be achieved is through pre-discipleship, which ultimately leads people to Jesus so that their lives will be transformed through Christ.

A second goal in Christian education is building community. Christian education was never meant to be solely an individual pursuit, but people are to learn in the context of community.

Community, as a goal for religious education, means three things: (1) a normative ideal; (2) reflection and support; and (3) a dialectic process. First, as a normative ideal, the community approach to education links both personal and communal development ... Second, reflection and support takes place through the conversations of the groups ... Third, viewing the conversation about people’s lives collectively is a dialectic process that empowers people to reengage in community building.³²⁵

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, pre-discipleship education meets this goal of building community. It is not solely about a person’s journey in gathering information about the Christian faith, but also about engaging in supportive relationships in Christian community.

A third goal in Christian education is spiritual growth of both the community and the individual in the community.

Growth became the metaphor for development because it seemed to be the only alternative for an endpoint that thwarts human creativity. But the metaphor of growth, taken from biology and mathematics, is too primitive for describing personal development. A person develops in relation to wholeness: The deeper the inwardness, the more integral the

³²³ Jack L. Seymour, ed., *Mapping Christian Education: Approaches to Congregational Learning* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 18–19.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 48–49.

communion of persons. Of course, aspects of that development can be described as growth, but other aspects could be called *shrinking* or *simplification*. A Christian view of development has no *endpoint* (what Christianity calls an idol) but it moves toward a definite end: the communion of all.³²⁶

Although those who believe that an unbeliever is spiritually dead might argue that there is no spiritual growth within pre-discipleship, a case can be made that there is movement within a pre-disciple on the spiritual journey towards Christ.

A fourth goal in Christian education is religious instruction. Elizabeth Caldwell believes that religious instruction is homemaking, “a connective, creative act of the human imagination and a primary activity of Spirit. It is the creation of forms and patterns which cultivate and shelter life itself.”³²⁷

What is missing in such congregations is an ethos of a faithful learning community that empowers by its planning for faithful learning across the ages. Or in other words, making a home as a learning and growing community of Christians has been forgotten or abandoned. The church as a place of homemaking with a great room of people, using content and methods that integrate worship, education, mission, stewardship, and community is here never considered.³²⁸

Caldwell observed that in religious education, the goals for adults in many congregations are different from those for children and youth when they should be the same. Christian education should aim to transform lives, build the community, encourage spiritual growth, and develop an environment for religious instruction.

As this section shows, the goals of Christian education, which lead to a healthy change, growth, and learning on the spiritual journey in the context of community, can be realized through pre-discipleship. It also provides additional support for the practice pre-discipleship for seekers in adult Christian education.

³²⁶ Ibid., 69–70.

³²⁷ Ibid., 77.

³²⁸ Ibid., 78.

V. The Practice of Adult Christian Education

The theories of learning and the principles of adult education previously discussed provide insight on how adults can gain knowledge regarding the Christian faith and principles to guide the process. This section shifts to the practical side of adult education and discusses ways to implement the theories and principles. It will examine the literature to identify how pre-discipleship can best be practiced. Some of methods commonly used for adult education, such as classes, workshops, seminars, and conferences have been the standard means of educating adults; however, other factors are useful in adult Christian education. Many scholars are qualified to provide practical insights on adult Christian education, but this section examines the work of two key authors. The first is Jane Vella, a leading expert on adult education, and the other is Leonard Sweet, a leading authority on teaching the post-modern adult.

Jane Vella, who believes that the best means of educating adults is through dialogue, identifies twelve principles for effective adult learning, principles that have relevance for pre-discipleship.

One basic assumption in all this is that adult learning is best achieved in dialogue. *Dia* means “between,” *logos* means “word.” Hence, *dia + logue* = “the word between us.” The approach to adult learning based on these principles holds that adults have enough life experience to be in dialogue with any teacher about any subject and will learn new knowledge, attitudes, or skills best in relation to that life experience. Danah Zohar calls dialogue a quantum process, the means of doing quantum thinking. In this approach to adult learning all twelve principles and practices are ways to begin, maintain, and nurture the dialogue:

- *Need assessment*: participation of the learners in naming what is to be learned.
- *Safety* in the environment and the process. We create a context for learning. That context can be made safe.
- *Sound relationships* between teacher and learner and among learners.
- *Sequence* of content and *reinforcement*.
- *Praxis*: action with reflection or learning by doing.
- *Respect for learners as decision makers*.
- *Ideas, feelings, and actions*: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects of learning.
- *Immediacy* of the learning.
- *Clear roles and role development*.

- *Teamwork* and the use of small groups.
- *Engagement* of learners in what they are learning.
- *Accountability*: how do they know they know!³²⁹

Engagement in dialogue is ideal in the pre-discipleship process. While not all adults learn through dialogue and some may be self-directed learners, the majority of adult learners benefit from dialogue education. Vella pointed out that “this model of dialogue education assumes that human beings come to learning with some appetite, and that they can and will make intelligent choices.”³³⁰ Dialogue is the best means of practicing pre-discipleship. Those who participate in pre-discipleship are motivated to learn about God and his truths.

Dialogue appeals to post-modern adults, who learn differently than people raised under the influence cognitive-oriented models of modernity, because it allows them to discuss issues openly and safely. Leonard Sweet writes, “Post-moderns don’t want to ‘study under’ any authority figure; they want to study the authority figure. They don’t need ‘authorities’ to help them gain information. But ironically, they need ‘authorities’ more than ever before to mentor them in how to use, perform, and model the information.”³³¹

Sweet suggests that a practical means of educating post-modern adults is a model he calls EPIC for experiential, participatory, interactive, and communal.³³² The theories of learning and the principles of adult Christian education can be summed up in EPIC, which is consistent with the orientations of the behaviorists, humanists, social learners, and constructivists. EPIC also sets the context in which Vella’s use of dialogue in adult education can be applied.

The use of dialogue in the context of experience, participation, interaction, and community are practical means of pre-discipleship. Some seekers need to experience God before making a commitment to Him. Others need to get involved in dialoging about God in the pre-discipleship process in an interactive community. The practice of adult

³²⁹ Jane Vella, *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach: The Power of Dialogue in Educating Adults* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 3–4.

³³⁰ Jane Vella, *Dialogue Education at Work* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 5.

³³¹ Leonard Sweet, *Soul Tsunami: Sink or Swim in New Millennium Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 187.

³³² *Ibid.*, 215.

education in respect to Vella's dialogue and Sweet's EPIC are significant in pre-discipleship.

VI. Summary of Pre-discipleship and Adult Education

In summary, this pedagogical study is significant to pre-discipleship in a number of ways. The history of Christian education supports the use of pre-discipleship in the church, showing that it was practiced throughout church history, especially in the early church and during the Enlightenment. The study on the theories of learning and the principles of adult religious education affirmed that pre-discipleship is a sound pedagogical approach to teaching Christianity. The goals of religious education confirm the need for transformation, spiritual growth, and learning in the context of Christian community, which are applicable to pre-discipleship. The discussion on educational process suggests that pre-discipleship may best be conducted with seekers through dialogue in an experiential, participatory, interactive, and communal context to enhance proper conversion and discipleship.

Pre-discipleship is thus a valid way of teaching the story of Christ to willing seekers. Although not every seeker is active in searching out truth, a significant number do want to study the basics of the faith before making any commitment. This leads to the need for a pre-discipleship curriculum, which is the focus of the following chapter and its description of a pilot study on curriculum.

Chapter Five: A Pre-discipleship Pilot Study

The intent of this thesis was to investigate pre-discipleship of seekers as being a significant phase in Christian conversion and the discipleship-making process and to investigate how to improve an existing pre-discipleship curriculum, the *7 Discoveries*. The previous chapters have laid the biblical, theological, psychological, and educational foundations for pre-discipleship and shown that pre-discipleship is a credible approach to evangelism. This chapter moves on to examine ways to improve an existing curriculum, called the *7 Discoveries*, which developed from a series of sermons used for pre-discipleship. The curriculum has been used in groups in Unionville Oasis Church, Unionville, Ontario, with some success. However, to understand its true effectiveness and how to improve it, it was important to conduct a series of pilot studies to evaluate the impact of the *7 Discoveries* as sound material for pre-discipleship. The following chapter is a description of the pilot study candidates, research questions, implementation, and research analysis.

The best type of research for evaluating the *7 Discoveries* is qualitative formative evaluation because it is important to study those who have worked through the information in the *7 Discoveries* and to learn from their feedback. The purpose of the formative evaluation was to see how the *7 Discoveries* could be improved and the focus of the research was on discovering the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the book. The desired results were recommendations for improvement from those who were interviewed; this formative evaluation was conducted through a series of pilot studies on the *7 Discoveries*.

The intent of the pilot studies was to sample organized studies on the *7 Discoveries* that were conducted in different ways and with people from a variety of

situations. The methodology used in the pilot studies was to first work through the book with three groups of people and then seek feedback from the participants. After the data had been collected, the researcher reflected upon the information provided, with the intent of learning how to improve the *7 Discoveries*.

I. Pilot Study Candidates

Since the target audience of *7 Discoveries* was seekers, unbelievers, or those who were uncertain or young in their faith, that was the type of participant sought for the studies. Three groups of people were good candidates for this pilot study: Christians at a church I had planted, seekers, or those uncertain of their faith from the same church, and people from the community.

The first group was recruited in the fall of 2006 through an announcement inviting anyone interested in learning about baptism to join the baptismal class after the church service on Sundays. Those who attended the baptismal class were told that attendance in the class did not necessarily mean that they would end up being baptized.

The first baptismal class comprised seven people including researcher and a person who came to encourage another participant. The initial group of five grew to ten by the end of the baptismal classes. The ten baptismal candidates comprised a man in his fifties, a working mother, and a young woman in her thirties, a recent graduate of university, a university student, and five high school students. Four of the high school students were in the tenth grade (sophomore year), while the other high school student was in the ninth grade (freshman year). This mix made for a diverse range of candidates, and this group will now be referred to as the *baptismal readers*.

The second group of candidates comprised seekers who had not responded to the invitation for the baptismal class. I identified five candidates whom I could contact about going through individual studies with me in the *7 Discoveries*. I contacted the five prospective candidates individually and all five agreed to meet one-on-one to study the *7 Discoveries*. However, out of the five, I could obtain data from only one reader; the other four were still studying the book when the research ended. The one who was able to respond with data shared the book with his wife, who also read *7 Discoveries* and she

was interviewed for her feedback. These two readers will be referred to as *individual readers*.

A third group of candidates, people in the community, were recruited through an advertisement placed in the local community paper inviting people interested in learning about Christianity to come to a meeting. A room was rented in the local community center to provide a non-threatening environment. The first study class had five people: one was a leader from the church who wanted to show her support and another was a relative of hers, who never came back. However, the other three participants were seekers from the community. Two were a retired couple from an East Indian background and the other was a nearly retired lady who has a Jewish and Christian background. These readers shall be referred to as *community readers*.

II. Pilot Study Research Questions

The research questions for the pilot study were formed to help the researcher understand what was going through the minds of the readers as they read the book. In particular, the questions were designed to discover which aspects of the book had appeal and which did not. The research questions included a “how” question in the research question to elicit good evaluative research. According to Norman Blaikie, “‘How’ questions are only used with the objective of change.”³³³ The question was *how could the 7 Discoveries be improved to become an effective tool in pre-discipleship?* Although the “how” questions were significant to the study, not all questions had to be of the “how” type. It was also important to learn “what” aspects of the book had an impact and even why it did or did it not touch the reader.

The first question in the study, “How did you feel about the *7 Discoveries*?” was intended to discover the readers’ general reaction to the *7 Discoveries*. It was more of an icebreaker and intended to lay the foundation for a meaningful dialogue concerning the book. The answers, whether they resulted from anger, joy, frustration, or indifference,

³³³ Norman Blaikie, *Analyzing Quantitative Data: From Description to Explanation* (London: Sage Publications, 2003), 13.

would reflect the mood of the reader in answering the remainder of the questions and help the researcher understand their psyche as they studied the *7 Discoveries*.

The next question asked was “What did you learn from the *7 Discoveries*?” This question was asked to discover what knowledge the reader had gained and which aspects, if any, of the *7 Discoveries* were most meaningful at a personal level. It was interesting to see the cognitive responses to the book along with the emotive ones.

The next series of questions asked about the specific chapters of the book. The focus of each chapter was summarized in one or two sentences and the readers were asked for their response to that chapter. The recapping was done in case readers had forgotten the chapter by the time of the interview and to help them reflect more deeply about each chapter so they could give detailed answers rather than a general response.

Readers were also asked which chapter they found to be the most helpful and the reasoning behind it. This question was intended to lead them to compare the chapters and give the researcher another way of discovering which chapters, if any, had the most impact on readers’ lives. The author wanted to know which aspects of the book had stood out in people’s minds and which needed improvement.

This led to the two next questions, “Which chapter (s) did you not find helpful? Why?” These research questions were intended to gather the negative responses that are just as valuable as positive responses.

The next question was designed to discover whether the book had helped the readers in their spiritual journey. Since the purpose of this book was to help people in their journey to Christ, the author wanted to know whether the book achieved that purpose and how it did that. This question was intended to serve as a reality check to learn whether the concept of pre-discipleship and the *7 Discoveries* was a valid one. A large negative response would have caused the author to re-evaluate use of the *7 Discoveries* tool. Positive responses would indicate the author should proceed with thankfulness in humility.

The final question on *7 Discoveries* dealt with the how to improve on the book. The answers would help the researcher meet the main objective of this thesis, which is “How to improve upon this pre-discipleship curriculum?” The most direct way of learning this was to ask the readers themselves.

The study was designed so each reader would be interviewed during a personal meeting, which is considered traditionally the most reliable method of data collecting. Teresa Morris writes, “As you work your way through your data collection instrument, you can see the person, you can make a nonverbal assessment of how things are going and whether the respondent is offering reliable and valid information.”³³⁴ When a face-to-face interview was not possible, the interview was conducted over the telephone.

III. Pilot Study Implementation

Pilot studies were conducted among three groups of people: the baptismal readers, individual readers, and community readers. Each group was dealt with differently but with the same objective, to read each chapter of the *7 Discoveries* with the researcher and discuss the concepts in each chapter. The research goal was to have a sample of candidates to interview for data collection.

A. Pilot Study among Baptismal Readers

Beginning in August 2006, announcements were made in Unionville Oasis Church, Unionville, Ontario, that there would be baptismal classes from September 17, 2006 to November 5, 2006. The baptismal service was scheduled to be on November 19, 2006. This first class was an introduction and a review of the contents of chapter one, Discover God, in the *7 Discoveries*. The first baptismal class had five baptismal candidates: baptismal reader 1 was a man in his fifties with a high school education; baptismal reader 2 was a mother of two, one in university and the other a teenager. Baptismal reader 3 was a male teen in the tenth grade, which is equivalent to the sophomore year of high school; baptismal reader 4 was a post-secondary school student at a Toronto college. Baptismal reader 5 was a female student in the tenth grade, who emphasized that she wanted to attend the class to see whether she was ready for baptism; when she began the classes she did not feel ready. Baptismal readers 1, 2, and 3 all felt that

³³⁴ Teresa Morris, *Social Work Research Methods: Four Alternative Paradigms* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, Inc. 2006), 48.

they should take the next step in their spiritual journey in baptism. Baptismal reader 4 was also uncertain and wanted to learn more.

The second baptismal class was about discovering the word of God. Two new students joined the class. Baptismal reader 6 was a university co-op student who works in Toronto. Baptismal reader 7 was a single young working woman in her early thirties; she had with a post-secondary education. On the third week, baptismal reader 8 joined the class; he was a male high school student in the tenth grade.

All those who joined later were given opportunities to make up the missed classes. Some read the material themselves while others were given an intense update on the book. This was the case with baptismal readers 9 and 10, who had missed the first three classes. On the Saturday afternoon before the fourth baptismal class, they were taken through the first three chapters of the *7 Discoveries*. Baptismal reader 9 was a female high school student in the tenth grade and baptismal reader 10 was a male high school student in the ninth grade and the youngest student in the class. It was encouraging to see that by the fourth class, there were ten potential candidates for baptism.

The fourth baptismal class was about Discovering Jesus. The standard questions were asked and the materials in the chapter were covered. This was the same routine for the next few weeks as the class met after the worship service. Week five dealt with Discover Love and week six dealt with Discover Forgiveness. The discussions and responses in those classes were nothing out of the ordinary.

The seventh week of the *7 Discovery* was interesting. Chapter one to four in the book is designed to appeal to the mind to provide the cognitive understanding of God, the Bible, and Jesus Christ needed before a person is ready to receive the gospel. Chapters five and six are designed to appeal to the emotions and contained parables that Jesus told, which touched the heart. Because the proclamation of the good news must also include a volitional component, chapter 7 in *7 Discoveries* was Discover the Good News, which presented the gospel and confronted the reader with the challenge of following Jesus.

During the seventh chapter, the baptismal class was asked with the following questions: What will keep you from totally following Jesus? Are you willing to become a Christian now and be a disciple of Jesus Christ? Are you willing to repent of your sins? Are you willing to believe in Jesus Christ? Are you willing to follow Jesus Christ? There

was much discussion and many responses. Baptismal candidate 5 said in the class, “I have done one and two but I am not ready to do three yet. I am not sure if I had come to Christ.” The one and two was in reference to the questions: Are you willing to repent of your sins? And are you willing to believe in Jesus Christ? After some discussion, a couple of others in the class also said that they have done one and two but were uncertain about the third question which was Are you willing to follow Jesus?

During the class, the students were given an opportunity to reflect and to respond to the questions appealing to their wills. Two of the baptismal students were absent, but three out of the remaining eight prayed to receive Christ. There was a holy moment when gospel was presented. The four out of the five remaining students were already believers. The other student wanted more time to consider it and planned to be baptized in the spring of 2007. The outcome of the class was that five of the ten students were baptized on November 19, 2007.

Eight out of the ten students in the baptismal class were interviewed after the classes were over. Baptismal readers 4 and 6 did not complete all the classes and so were not interviewed. Most of the interviews were conducted individually after church on Sundays over in November and December of 2006, but a couple o were conducted in home settings. The interviews took from fifteen minutes to forty minutes to complete. The respondents were very co-operative and accommodating, giving fairly encouraging and honest feedback. The data collected was significant in understanding the impact of 7 *Discoveries*.

B. Pilot Study among Individual Readers

The five individual readers were people who attended Unionville Oasis Church but had not made professions of faith nor given any indication that they were growing in Christ. These five readers shall be referred to as individual readers 1 to 5. Individual reader 1 was a lab technician in a hospital who was dissatisfied with life and in search of spirituality. He started attending the church with his family on and off for a few months and had moved away from the area, but still was connected to the church. He met with the author on his days off and sometimes two lessons in 7 *Discoveries* were covered in one session.

Individual readers 2 and 3 were husband and wife who had attended the church on and off for a little over a year. The husband was in the car maintenance industry and had operated a local small business. The wife had worked in the family business but at the time was not working in it but was taking care of the home. Individual readers 2 and 3 agreed to meet in their home when the husband was not working. After the first two sessions, individual reader 3 commented, “This is the foundation that we’ve never had.” Unfortunately, no meeting further meetings were possible because of the husband’s demanding schedule, and study of *7 Discoveries* was put on hold.

Individual reader 4 was a man who worked in the auto industry. His wife and children consistently attended the church but he does not feel the need to be at church on a weekly basis. The author and this reader had struck a friendship, and the reader was willing to go through the material on a bi-weekly basis. The author met with the individual on a regular basis but they did not complete the *7 Discoveries* before the interview was to be done. This meant that individual reader 4 was not ready to participate in the research.

Individual reader 5 was a man of complexities, who had faithfully attended Unionville Oasis Church since its inception because his wife and kids were committed to Christ. Individual reader 5, who professed to be an atheist, a Buddhist, and everything in between, did not seem to know what he believed. He was searching and had many questions concerning Christianity and did not oppose Christians holding the beliefs they do. He was a prime candidate for the *7 Discoveries*; however, after one session he decided that he wanted to go through the material at his own pace. He was not ready to be interviewed.

Out of the five individual readers, only individual reader 1 completed the *7 Discoveries* and when he was confronted with the challenge of the gospel in the last session, he gave his life to Christ. He was so excited about his newfound faith, that he requested a few more copies of the *7 Discoveries* and gave them to his in-laws. He encouraged his wife to read the *7 Discoveries* and she read certain sections several times, recommitted herself to Christ, and was willing to be interviewed. Individual reader 1’s wife became individual reader 6. Therefore, out of the six individual readers, two individuals were interviewed and their data was collected for analysis.

C. *Pilot Study among Community Readers*

The research among the community was the most challenging to conduct because there were many unknowns. I had many questions: Was anyone going to show up? Was anyone remotely interested in this topic? Who was willing to invest their time into this study out of personal interest without any kind of compensation? The many variables made this attempt to study reaction to *7 Discoveries* a little frightening. As well, the group would be strangers, not a baptismal class, nor or friendly church-going individuals. This was research would be conducted in an environment that might be neutral, indifferent, or even hostile to Christianity.

An advertisement was purchases to run in the local community paper, the *Markham Economist and Sun*, on Thursday, October 12, 2006 and Saturday, October 14, 2006, inviting people to the first day of study of the *7 Discoveries* on October 16, 2006.

The ad was in the form of a letter to the community and³³⁵ started with an informal greeting, “Hello Neighbour.” The letter then asked questions about their dissatisfaction in life, the material gains that left them unsatisfied, and friends who left them feeling lonely. Then there were two spiritual questions that might spark an interest in studying *7 Discoveries*: “Have you ever wondered about God but were too afraid to visit a church?” And “have you always wondered about spiritual matters, but do not know where to go?” The advertisement then introduced the *7 Discoveries* with a brief overview of some of the issues the study hoped to address. The need for a study group was described and the time the place and the contact number given. This first advertisement indicated that the people sought for this study were “not Christians” and emphasized that this study was designed for those who were interested in learning about Christianity. The ad promised that each participant would receive a copy of the book and said that snacks would be provided. An announcement was also made at Unionville Oasis Church about the evangelistic effort, encouraging people to invite friends who were seeking to this study.

The October 12, 2006 advertisement resulted in two phone calls of inquiry. But the advertisement did not appear in the Saturday paper because of a mix up with the

³³⁵ Appendix 2.

newspaper. On Monday, October 16, 2006, expensive snacks were purchased. Signs were put up around the Angus Glen Community Centre, a beautiful modern facility, which was less than five years old. The room that was rented could accommodate up to twenty people comfortably and overlooked a wide hallway. As the time approached 7:30 p.m., the start time of the meeting, the researcher felt anxious and wondered whether those who were personally invited and those who had responded to the ad would come. Was the community centre the right place to do the *7 Discoveries*? Were there too many distractions in life?

The activities happening in that community center were a micro-reflection of the flood of busyness in our world. The walls in the community centre are glass and participants would be able to see the local library, which was closed for the day, on one side of the room and, on the other side, see two large gymnasiums with four badminton courts, and beyond them, a hockey rink.

As time ticked away, it seemed that no one would come, and by 8:15 p.m., it was time to call it a night. Embarrassment at renting the room for nothing, disappointment, and discouragement faded into the night. It was time to think of a different strategy.

The local newspaper representatives apologized for the mix up and promised to publish another ad at their cost. The researcher struggled whether to give up or to try again, but decided to make one more try. This time the ad was to be published on October 21, 2006, to promote the first date at Angus Glen Community Center, which was October 23, 2006. When the ad was published, it also resulted in two inquiries.

When Monday evening came, the books and snacks were prepared; at 7:25 p.m., the lack of people seemed like déjà vu. However, at 7:30 p.m. an elderly retired couple of East Indian descent came with interest in the study. They became community reader 1, who was a man of 70 years of age, and community reader 2, who was a warm woman of good health. As few minutes passed after the introductions and another two people joined our group. Community reader 3 was a leader of the church who came to show her support. She and her husband operate a national food distribution business. Community reader 3 also had some theological training and her encouragement was appreciated. She brought along a relative who was seeking in the faith. Community reader 4 was a middle-aged man who had been dealing with health issues. Everyone was introducing himself or

herself when the fifth community reader arrived. She was a lady of Jewish background who had attended churches on and off for a few years. She was genuinely searching for answers in faith.

After the pleasantries, the group began the study of the book. Community reader 1 explained why he was in the group saying, “I am fascinated by religion.” Community reader 2 revealed her New Age tendencies when she said, “I believe that God is here in all of us. I believe that we should be open to faiths. There is more to it beyond science and logic.” Community reader 3 said, “I am here to learn.” Community reader 4 did not say much, but community reader 5 did say, “I have been in and out of churches.” Community reader 1 was very expressive about his beliefs when he said, “I am an agnostic. Man made up God to control people. I believe God is beyond what we can control.” After the session, community reader 4 commented, “You should not start with the argument of God’s existence. It is not an effective way to share the gospel.”

The second session was reduced to four community readers because community reader 4 did not return. However, the rest of the group had a wonderful time bonding and discovering the various aspects of Christianity during the following six weeks. When one of the community readers did not show up, the session was made up at a different time during the week. In the end, community readers 1, 2, and 5 were interviewed; community reader 3 did not finish the sessions.

There were some treasured times with the community readers. After the group reviewed the chapter *Discover the Bible*, community reader 5 responded saying, “It was very helpful, it makes me want to learn more about the Bible.” The comments from the community readers were encouraging and expressed a hunger for the truth. In the same study, community reader 1 asked, “Why in the world would God want to pursue us?” The week that the group started to the chapter *Discover Jesus*, they were presented with the claims of Jesus as being the way, the truth, and the life. Community reader 2 responded, “To say that Jesus is better than the others is what starts the argument. Jesus was egocentric.” During the study of *Discover Love*, the group discussed the subject of sacrificing an animal being as a payment for sins. Community reader 2 shook her head in disgust and said, “Why should the poor animal die because of some one else’s sin. The

one who sins should die for his own sins.” During the chapter on forgiveness, community reader 1 asked, “How do you know for sure that God has forgiven us?”

The three community readers were not ready to follow Jesus when presented with the good news. However, friendships were made and the relationships have continued and hopefully in time these participants will find Jesus. The interviews were done no later than ten days after the last session.

The research for this pilot study took several months to collect and analyze. The three sources for the data: the baptism readers, the individual readers, and the community readers resulted in thirteen informative interviews. It is from these interviews that data has been collected with feedback on how to improve the *7 Discoveries*. The joy of this journey was not in the collection of data, but the lives that were being changed in the process.

IV. Pilot Study Research Analysis

After the data from the pilot studies were collected, the information was analyzed for recommendations from the participants and from the results that were gathered. During the interviews, specific questions concerning the book were asked.³³⁶ The following is the results of the research.

A. *Concerning How the Readers Felt About the Book in General*

The first question asked each interviewee was “How did you feel about the *7 Discoveries* in general?” Here were a few of their responses. One reader said, “There were some things I didn’t understand, but I did understand I have a physical birthday and a spiritual birthday. I found the book to be very good. It helped me know more about Christ.” Another reader said, “I learned a lot from the book. I found it informative. It cleared up a lot of confusions I had, but sometimes I’m still confused with the trinity.”

Another response was, “I found it easy to read. I like the fact that the book is in point form. I did not find anything too bad in the book, but it may need shorter chapters

³³⁶ Appendix 4.

so that it is easier to digest.” Another reader said, “After reading it I recommitted my life again to the Lord. I became a Christian when I was a teen. At that time, it was a leap of faith for me to believe and I was very emotional. After moving on with my life, I came back to church early last year with many doubts. The book helped me with some of the questions I had. It helped in getting me to read my Bible again.”

A reader from the community commented, “Through the book I gained a better understanding and was more informed about Christianity. I found the book helpful, but the book was very much related to Jesus; it was a walled-in vision perspective.” When asked what she meant by “walled-in vision perspective” she said that Christianity seems to be so narrowed in vision on Jesus. Another community reader responded, “I think the way you’ve done it (written the book) is very good. It is logical, containing the ABCs of Christianity. I liked the chapter on the Old and New Testament, and how Old Testament relates to the Testament. I found the prophecies and the comments on the prophecy interesting. You’ve also given people who love research references so that they can do their own research.”

The majority of the readers were generally positive about the book and the responses ranged from very helpful to one who found it boring. The purpose of this question was to gain a general overall impression of the *7 Discoveries*. The research showed that the overall response was positive and the readers generally felt from that it was a tool that is helpful in people’s spiritual journey towards Christ.

B. Concerning What the Readers Learned from the Book

Each of the readers was asked what he or she had learned from the *7 Discoveries*. The majority of the responses indicated that they learned something. One reader said, “I learned about how to forgive.” Another reader said, “I learned about love and the different kinds of love that God shows. I also learned from the Bible phone numbers as a tool for remembering an overall picture of the Bible.” Another reader responded, “I learned what it means to be a Christian, how to forgive, and about Jesus.” Another reader said, “I learned about the evidences for the existence of God and the evidences of the Bible being the word of God.” One reader from the community commented, “I learned

from it but you have to be open to the book. There was nothing in the book that I did not hear before. I learned from the Bible phone numbers.”

Most of the readers learned something from the *7 Discoveries*; it is interesting that different aspects of the book touched each reader differently. Some learned from the cognitive aspects of the book, while others learn from its emotive aspects. Out of the twelve who were more specific in describing what they learned, six of the readers mentioned the chapters on love and forgiveness, while five mentioned the chapters more focused on facts and information. About half of those who learned from the book were touched by it intellectually and the other half touched emotionally.

C. Concerning the Response of the Readers to Discover God

Each of the next seven questions dealt with a different chapter and each reader interviewed was given a verbal summary of the chapter to refresh their memories before they were asked to comment on the chapter. The first four chapters of the *7 Discoveries* deal with information, data, and facts in a logical progression.

The chapter on Discover God begins with five evidences for the existence of God and then covers the attributes of God giving the reader an overall picture of the God of the Bible. The chapter highlights some the acts of God and concludes with the glory of God. One reader commented, “I liked the listing of all the attributes and the examples that were given.” Another reader said, “The evidence was a good way for me to explain the existence of God.” Another reader said, “I liked the scientific aspects of the chapter and I appreciate the references that are there I can check out.”

Four of the eleven readers who chose a favorite chapter or one that was most helpful chose Discover God. This chapter was written to appeal to the cognitive side of a reader and attempts to address the doubt about existence of God. The result from this question showed the author that Discover God was the place to start in terms of helping people in their faith journey.

D. Concerning the Response of the Readers to Discover the Word of God

The second chapter of the book is Discover the Word of God. Building on the premise that God does exist, the question is asked, “Does God communicate with us?” What evidences are there that the Bible is the word of God? The chapter highlights some of the evidences that indicate that the Bible is the word of God and what that implies. The chapter was intended to build a bridge between learning about the existence of God and the overview of the Bible.

One reader said, “I really liked the background information on the Bible. I was especially interested in the archeology supporting the Bible. Archeology is an interest of mine.” Another reader who grew up in a Christian home said, “I had it heard of it before, and it didn’t hit me.” Another reader, in contrast, said, “The evidence that the Bible is the word was very helpful in clearing some of the doubts I have had.” One reader from the community remarked, “I did not know there is so much to learn from the Bible.”

The comments indicated that the majority of the readers seemed benefited from the chapter Discover the Word of God. It was certainly needed to build a bridge between the existence of God and the overview of the Bible. The response showed the author that this chapter was rightly placed in the book.

E. Concerning the Response of the Readers to Discover the Bible

Discover the Bible was the third chapter and gave readers an overview of the Bible, using two phone numbers as mnemonics to help people remember the contents of the Old and New Testaments. The purpose of the chapter was to give the readers the big picture of how people, places, and events fit together. The feedback to this chapter was very encouraging.

One reader said, “The phone numbers were very help. It made things easy to remember.” Another reader said, “I wanted to memorize the phone numbers. I liked the summaries given of each book.” Still another reader commented, “It was very informative. I liked the charts and the numbering system. It was a good overview of the Bible.” Another commented, “It was very helpful. The chapter was great. It made the

Bible not intimidating.” One community reader said, “I liked this chapter concerning the Bible. I especially liked how the Old Testament leads into the New Testament.”

The chapter that gave the overview of the Bible received an overwhelming positive response and the findings indicated that the lesson removed some of the feelings of intimidation many people have in approaching the Bible. The research revealed how many people, looking for faith or young in faith, want to understand the Bible.

F. Concerning the Response of the Readers to Discover Jesus

One cannot share Christianity without sharing Jesus, so the chapter Discover Jesus is central to the presentation of the gospel. This chapter discusses Jesus’ existence, birth, life, death, resurrection, claims, and presence.

One reader remarked, “I liked the outline given of Jesus and the summaries. Another reader stated that the chapter on Jesus “was helpful, especially with the evidences of the resurrection.” Another reader said, “It reaffirmed what I already knew about Jesus.” Another reader said, “It was pretty thorough. I liked the use of H.G. Wells in the chapter.” One reader from the community said, “I know very little about Jesus. I accept his birth, but it is hard to accept him. I don’t know why we have to go through Jesus to get to God. It seems like God is handicapped.”

The reaction from the readers was mixed; the non-positive response to came mainly from readers who were quite familiar with Christianity. Those who were not so familiar with Christianity learned much from this chapter. The research results indicated that the chapter on Jesus was needed.

G. Concerning the Response of the Readers to Discover Love

With the fifth chapter, Discover Love, the book moves at a slower pace than those at the cognitive level and aims to appeal to the emotive side of readers. This chapter deals with the topic of love in relation to God, one’s neighbor, and one’s enemy. It highlights the parable of the Good Samaritan and refers to a statement in the Bible that says “God is

love.”³³⁷ Then it asks the readers that if God is love, can a person truly experience love without experiencing God? The responses of the readers were interesting.

One reader responded, “God expects so much from us when it comes to love.” Another commented, “Love is hard to understand and practice.” Another reader said, “The love of God is different than what I understood it to be before. I liked the part about God’s love and brotherly love.” Another reader commented, “I learned that I can’t love without God. I liked the challenge of loving a neighbor.” Individual reader 6 remarked, “I kind of heard about love before.” One reader from the community said, “It was a wise interpretation of love.”

The feedback from the readers on *Discover Love* was generally positive. It was helpful in changing a couple of readers’ perspectives on love. The author had anticipated that there would be more of a positive response to this chapter, but did find that those who were relatively new to Christianity gained much from this chapter.

H. Concerning the Response of the Readers to Discover Forgiveness

Discover Forgiveness was the chapter on sin and forgiveness and it also appealed to readers’ emotive side. Two parables of Jesus were highlighted, The Prodigal Son and The Merciless Servant. The main point was to show that a forgiven person is a forgiving person. It is one thing to be able to receive the forgiveness of God, but another to respond to divine forgiveness by forgiving others. This was the one of the chapters that generated the most positive response.

One reader reacted saying, “Marvelous, everyone should follow this.” Another commented, “I’m still working on it.” Another said, “It talked about much about forgiveness, but I find it hard to practice. I liked the stories and the details given about the stories in the chapter.” Another said, “I finally understood now why I need to forgive.” One reader from the community said, “The son going away, and coming back; it opened your eyes to forgiveness. I would love to forgive. It was also the son willing to show how much he loved his father in going back.”

³³⁷ I John 4:8 NIV.

Four out of the eleven who chose a chapter that stood out to them choose *Discover Forgiveness*. The feedback indicated that the readers understood that discovering forgiveness is more than discovering the forgiveness of God; it is also being able to forgive others. There is also a recognition that the stories in *7 Discovers* appeals to the emotive side of the readers.

I. Concerning the Response of the Readers to Discover the Good News

The last chapter of the *7 Discoveries* is Discover the Good News was designed to appeal to the will through a series of questions. This chapter covered the incident in which a rich young man approached Jesus and asked him about eternal life. For some of the readers, reading this chapter was their first exposure to the gospel. The feedback to this chapter was critical to the purpose of this book.

One reader said, “I prayed to follow Jesus.” Another reader commented, “The good news was straight forward. It is hard to repent, believe, and follow Jesus. It lets me know what to do if I want to get closer to God.” Another reader said, “Considering the challenge to repent, believe, and be willing to follow Jesus, I need to spend more time here.” Another remarked, “I liked the repentance diagram and putting ourselves under God.” Another reader said, “It helped me understand Christianity. It helped me understand that I needed to ask God to forgive me and to come into my life. It’s about God, not about me.” One reader remarked, “I recommitted my life to Jesus Christ.” One reader from the community said, “Is that the good news? The personal Jesus, I would like to be his friend.” In contrast, another community reader said, “I found discover the good news is disappointing, because discovering the good news is discovering Jesus.”

Five out of the thirteen readers had grown up in a Christian environment and only six out of the thirteen professed any kind of faith in Jesus Christ. There was an uncertainty of about the status of ten readers’ faith as a Christian. This is why it is important to note that five out of the ten readers responded to the study by deciding to follow Jesus, and one other reader rededicated her life to Jesus. Of the remaining four, three are still investigating or thinking about their response to Christ, while the other one is very resistant about changing his mind. The research showed that chapter seven achieved the purpose of presenting the gospel and appealing to the will of the reader.

J. Concerning the Chapter the Readers Found Most Helpful

The readers were asked which chapter in the book they found most helpful as another way of assessing which aspects of the *7 Discoveries* were on target and which were off target. The question was asked after a review of the book and using a list of the titles of each chapter. The results proved to be interesting.

One reader said that the chapter on forgiveness was the part of the book that helped him most, describing it as “most powerful.” Another reader indicated that Discover God was the chapter that helped her the most because it explained to her “where God came from and gave explanations about God.” Another reader said that Discover the Word was her favorite because “the word makes you want to believe.” Another reader said that his favorite was the chapter on “Jesus because it did have much information on him.” Another responded saying, “The first two chapters helped deal with my doubts. I also liked Discover the Bible.”

Two of the thirteen readers did not choose any chapters as being helpful. The remaining eleven chose different chapters as the one that helped them the most. The two most popular chapters were chapter one on Discover God and chapter six on Discover Forgiveness: Four readers each choose them as most helpful. The other chapters that helped readers were the chapters on the word of God, on the Bible, and on Jesus. Only the chapters on love and on the good news were not chosen as being most helpful, but in this small sampling, it does not mean that they were not helpful.

The responses to those chapters indicated to the researcher that people are touched by God differently. Some people need the intellectual information to be able to move along in the faith journey. Others need the emotive motivation to move them along the faith journey. The feedback confirmed that the intentional appeal to mind, emotions, and will in the *7 Discoveries* was a good balance.

K. Concerning the Chapter the Readers Found Least Helpful

Each reader was also asked which chapter in the book she or he found not to be helpful in an attempt to evaluate the impact of the book from the aspect of negative feedback. The following are the results.

One reader said that he did not find Discover the Bible helpful because he “did not understand the relationship between the Old and the New.” Another reader said, “I’m not sure. I learned from all of them. There were different sub-sections I learned and did not learn from.” Another reader mentioned the chapter on Jesus because he “already knew about it.” One community reader said, “I could not accept the chapter on Jesus. It’s hard to accept in the virgin birth.” Another community reader said in response, “The chapter on the good news. I was surprised by it and found it hard to accept. I found out that Discover the Good News is Discover Jesus.”

It was interesting that seven of the thirteen readers, or more than half, said that they did not find any one chapter unhelpful. Of the remaining six readers, three choose Discover Jesus and the others mentioned Discover God, Discover the Bible, and Discover the Good News. The reason why two of the three who did not find Discover Jesus helpful was because they had grown up in the Christian home and most, if not all, the materials covered in that chapter was basic teaching on Jesus. The feedback to this question reveals that no one chapter in *7 Discoveries* needs a major revision.

L. Concerning the Impact “7 Discoveries” Had on the Readers

Each reader was asked whether the *7 Discoveries* had helped in their spiritual journey because the book was designed to introduce the basics to one who is seeking Christ and was to be a simple introduction to the ABCs of Christianity. This line of questioning was valuable to understanding of the impact of the book in relation to its objectives.

One reader responded saying, “Yes, the book has helped me in my journey. It should me how Jesus rose from the dead. His words help me understand and gave me a foundation for faith. Before I accepted Christ, I did not know anything about Christ.” Another reader remarked, “Reading it, I know what is God’s expectation of me is in this journey with him.” Another reader shared, “Yes, the book made me believes more. I now know what I believe. I know why I believe not because my parents believed.”

Another reader responded, “The book reminded me of God. It brought me back to light. It laid a foundation. It opened my eyes again, brought me back to him.” Another reader thought for a minute and said, “I’m not sure, it brought me closer to God. I

understand my faith more. The book gave me a good foundation.” Still another reader said, “The book asked challenging questions like ‘What will keep you from totally following Jesus?’ It makes you think and it is relevant.”

One reader said, “The aspect of the existence of God and the validity of the Bible helped me start on the journey.” Another commented, “The book helped a lot. It was exactly what I was looking for because it started from the beginning of the existence of God.” One reader from the community said, “It isn’t helpful if I don’t do it; that is to accept Christ. I like the way the book all fit together. I was aware of all these things. I think the book is great with the reality that God searching for us.”

The feedback from the readers on how the book has helped them on their spiritual journey was positive. One who did learn a lot from the book about Christianity, but may not perceive herself on a spiritual journey. One reader felt that he had to go through the materials because he wanted to be baptized. He already was familiar with most of the materials but acknowledged its usefulness in helping others in their journey. One community reader one had his mind closed to Christianity. He and his wife expected more of a comparative religions course and not an introduction to Christianity. This may explain why his comments were always so philosophical. He often gave his opinions without any supporting facts and many times seemed to tune out the truths that were presented. The data showed also to the researcher that the *7 Discoveries* were very helpful to those who were open to moving closer to God.

M. Concerning the Recommendations of the Readers

The readers were asked to give their recommendation on how the book could be improved; this feedback was useful because it addressed the heart of this research. The responses proved extremely valuable and will be used to develop recommendations on improving *7 Discoveries*.

One comment was to “try to use a better hook in the first chapter and find a way to not make it dry. Try to summarize it.” Another comment was, “Use more colors and pictures. It will make it interesting.” Another suggestion said, “Use smaller chapters and more pictures. I found that the charts were very helpful. I also found the questions to ponder helpful.” Another reader suggested, “Teach us how to apply it. Try to use more

examples and application.” Another reader said, “No improvement necessarily. The book was pretty good.” Another suggestion said that the book could use “more pictures.” One community reader commented, “No improvement needed. Good job! The chapters follow one after another. It already had references.”

The feedback provided insights on how to improve the book. Six out of the thirteen readers felt that no improvement was necessary, either because they felt inadequate to give the proper feedback or were satisfied with the way the book as it was. Three out of the five readers, who were teens, suggested more pictures. The one comment about the first chapter using more of a hook may have some validity. The author appreciated all the feedback given and has formed a number of recommendations from the research.

V. Summary of the Pilot Study

In summary, a series of pilot studies were conducted with a baptismal class, a number of individuals, and a group from the community. Out of the twenty-one participants, thirteen were eventually interviewed for their feedback on *7 Discoveries*. During this pilot study of the book, half of study participants who were not believers or who were uncertain of their faith decided to follow Jesus. The feedback regarding the *7 Discoveries* was overwhelmingly positive. The insights and feedback from the readers were invaluable for improving the pre-discipleship curriculum *7 Discoveries*. The feedback and recommendations are discussed in the next chapter. In God’s grace, these improvements will bring many into the kingdom.

Chapter Six: Feedback and Conclusions

This thesis has investigated the concept of pre-discipleship being a significant phase of Christian conversion and in the discipleship-making process and demonstrated biblically, theologically, and historically the significance of pre-discipleship in evangelism. People come to faith in Jesus Christ through a variety of means, including pre-discipleship, an approach that appeals to the many people who prefer to make major decisions through a process of study and reflection. This chapter summarizes the findings of the biblical study, the literature research, and the qualitative formative evaluation using them to review the soundness of pre-discipleship and of the *7 Discoveries* and to identify ways in which the *7 Discoveries* can be improved.

This chapter will first highlight the findings and conclusions for the *7 Discoveries* that came out of the biblical and theological research on pre-discipleship. Then it will outline findings from based on the literature reviews on evangelism, conversion, discipleship, and adult education. After that, the chapter will describe the feedback from the pilot study and end with concluding thoughts.

I. Conclusions from Biblical and Theological Research

The biblical and theological research provided a biblical basis for the theology of pre-discipleship and confirmed the value of the pre-discipleship tool the *7 Discoveries*. The research revealed a variety of biblical support for pre-disciples. It discipleship was common among New Testament believers, and that the disciples of Jesus were grounded in the word of God before they began to follow him. Both Jewish and Gentile converts to

Christianity in the New Testament period were shown to have gone through some type of pre-discipleship process, and pre-discipleship was shown to be a common process for teaching faith and one that led to conversion. Images used in the New Testament to describe conversions, such as the new birth, preparing the soil, entering the narrow gate, and counting the cost in the gospels, also support the pre-discipleship process. The research affirms that the practice of pre-discipleship was prevalent and supports the use of pre-discipleship approaches today.

The examination of the contents of the pre-discipleship course in question resulted in discovering two ways of improving the *7 Discoveries*. The study on Ray Comfort showed the value of putting a greater emphasis on the law of God. Comfort emphasizes, “If we are serious about reaching this world for God, we must return to the biblical principle of evangelism and use the Law of God.”³³⁸ Comfort points out that the law is the tool used by God to convict people of sin, to produce understanding, and to build faith. While the *7 Discoveries* mentioned the law, it did not place as heavy an emphasis on it as Ray Comfort would have. In response to this valuable insight, a section of the *7 Discoveries* was rewritten so that the law of God would stand out. Later versions of the book have a stronger emphasis on the law.

The biblical and theological study also indicated that that the book could use a greater emphasis on the kingdom of God. Since the central focus of the gospel is about the kingdom, the author realized that book *7 Discoveries* could put more stress on the kingdom of God. A couple of sentences were changed in the last chapter to explain the kingdom of God better. The emphasis on the last chapter now is that the good news is about Jesus Christ and his kingdom.

II. Conclusions from the Literature Review

The literature research on evangelism, conversion, and discipleship provided key information on the pre-discipleship context in which the *7 Discoveries* is being developed. The literature review showed that the concept of making disciples was absent in earlier definitions of evangelism, but it is now more present in current definitions of evangelism.

³³⁸ Comfort, 48.

The study showed that the practice of evangelism needs to be fluid, patient, and sensitive to the Holy Spirit through a pre-discipleship process. The review began by defining the work of the evangelist as one who brings a person from an unbelieving state into maturity in Christ. It reviewed the strengths and difficulties that arose in encounter and process evangelism, leading to an understanding that many evangelistic efforts are not as effective as the church would like to believe they are. In rethinking evangelism to identify more effective strategies, the need for a process in which seekers study the word of God in pre-discipleship became clear. The conclusion was that the way in which Christians reach out to the lost needs to be personal and informative.

One conclusion related to *7 Discoveries*, which was drawn from the literature review on evangelism, was that the environment in which the *7 Discoveries* may effectively be used needs to be considered. The study revealed that many people come to faith through meaningful relationships within the framework of process evangelism and so it is apparent that the *7 Discoveries* best could be conducted in the context of a meaningful relationship either in one-on-one scenario or in a small group.

The literature review on conversion affirmed that cognitive, emotive, and volitional changes occur in conversion, indicating that the conversion process involves the mind, emotions, and will. The study on the models of change demonstrated that conversion is a complex process that moves the convert towards transformation. Another finding was that the conversion process often occurs over a period of time rather than instantaneously, which means that those organizing evangelistic efforts must consider the need some people have to digest information in the conversion process. These findings affirmed that pre-discipleship can play a significant role in the conversion journey because it does recognize the conversion process, giving people the respect and time to make an informed commitment to Christ.

The literature review on discipleship showed that a practical relationship exists between pre-discipleship and discipleship. The characteristics and processes that are required in disciple-making process are similar to those needed in the pre-discipleship processes. Both discipleship and pre-discipleship function best in mentoring and accountability relationships. The review on discipleship also revealed that it is possible for a discipleship relationship to be developed from a pre-discipleship relationship. The

focus on the essence of and approaches to discipleship provided insight on the essence and approaches of pre-discipleship, such as how the teaching and learning or the mentoring relationships individually or in a group context can be applied to both. What happens in pre-discipleship can naturally migrate into discipleship.

The literature review on evangelism, conversion, and discipleship affirmed again that there is a place for pre-discipleship, a process in evangelism. The acceptance and practice of pre-discipleship allows people to have time in the process of conversion. It may change the approach of churches in their evangelism efforts so that instead of trying to pressure people to commit to Christ, they can challenge people to consider Christ through a pre-discipleship process.

While this literature review did not provided new information that could be used to revise the contents of the *7 Discoveries*, it did provide information on the methodology in the practice of pre-discipleship. Pre-discipleship can be practiced individually, in a one-on-one context, or in a group setting. This part of the review supports the need for mentoring relationships with accountability in pre-discipleship. This conclusion is an encouragement to those mentoring a seeker using pre-discipleship to not to be afraid to go deep into the Scriptures with a pre-disciple. Seekers who have chosen to be in a mentoring pre-discipleship relationships are already motivated to learn and have given their mentors the permission to take them to any level of spiritual depth as the mentor deemed acceptable.

III. Conclusions from the Study on Adult Education

The study on adult education affirmed that pre-discipleship is a significant aspect of Christian education. It began by looking at the history of Christian education, revealing that forms of pre-discipleship existed in church history. Then the review focused on theories of learning and the principles of adult religious education making a case for pre-discipleship as a reliable pedagogical approach for teaching the Christian faith. The study also discussed the goals of religious education and confirmed the need for transformation, spiritual growth, and learning in the context of Christian community, which are also relevant to pre-discipleship. The review on the educational process

concluded that pre-discipleship may best be taught to seekers through dialogue in an experiential, participatory, interactive engagement, in the context of community.

The conclusion drawn from the review on adult education is that *7 Discoveries* may best be presented with the use of experiential, participatory, and interactive dialogue in a community context. This affirms the value of “Questions to Ponder” provided at the end of each chapter in the book as a springboard to dialogue.

IV. Recommendations from the Feedback from Pilot Study

The qualitative formative evaluations provided direct feedback that helped improve the book. The interviews done as part of pilot studies with three different groups of readers resulted in three recommendations for improving the *7 Discoveries*. One of those recommendations in turn led to broader thinking on the media in which the pre-discipleship tool could be presented.

The first recommendation was that the first two chapters could use a stronger hook. One of the readers interviewed suggested adding a hook for the first chapter in the *7 Discoveries*. A young elementary school teacher, who read most of the book but was not formally interviewed because she read it over the summer, made a similar comment. The woman, who was not a Christian, said, “The first few chapters are a little dry, but it gets better as it goes.”³³⁹ The feedback from both these readers confirmed a suspicion on the author’s part that the first four chapters appealed to those who liked facts and information and so needed some revision to engage readers’ emotive side.

The other chapters had features that engaged the readers. Chapter 3 had the hook of the Bible phone numbers to help readers sift through the information. Chapter 4 can be seen as the story about Jesus. Chapters 5 to 7 each have a central story or stories. Adding a central story or stories to Chapter 1 and chapter 2 will make the *7 Discoveries* more appealing. This would be in keeping with a shift in today’s post-modern generation from being convinced by facts to being engaged by relational material.

The second recommendation was that the book could use more examples of application. One of the readers suggested, “Teach us how to apply it. Try to use more

³³⁹ P.L. Teh, conversation with author, 26 September 2006.

examples and application.” The truths taught in the *7 Discoveries* are meant to be relevant to readers and discussions of application and examples of application are important in helping people learn truth. Bruce Wilkinson says that the use of application is one of his seven principles for learning.³⁴⁰ The first four chapters, which have more of a cognitive appeal, are those that need more explanations of application. The last three chapters on love, forgiveness, and the good news contain clear applications. The last chapter of the book appeals to the will of a person and application is the response of the will in the gospel presentation. When a person willingly responds to Jesus as his personal Savior and Lord, he is applying the gospel to his life. The last chapter challenges the reader to obey or disobey the truth he or she has been given.

The third recommendation was that the book could use more graphics. Three out of the five teens interviewed suggested adding pictures and these would be a positive addition to the book. Books like Steve Kumar’s *Christianity for Skeptics* are appealing because of the colors and graphics that reinforce the main points. In the future, it would be a challenging but rewarding task to put the whole book into pictorial form. Millions of people in this world who are illiterate may benefit from graphic form of the *7 Discoveries*. If a picture is worth a thousand words, then there needs to be a means to share the truth and the gospel through pictures and stories.

The idea of a graphic book led to the idea that the book could be put into a DVD format. An interactive DVD would allow an individual or a group to move through the *7 Discoveries* at their pace. However, it would need to be produced in a way that makes it affordable.

The thinking concerning the *7 Discoveries* being on a DVD led to the idea that the book could be put into the internet. Using the internet to distribute *7 Discoveries* would be a logical progression from producing a DVD because the same material can be used for both. An online course would appeal to those in the post-modern generation who are seeking the truth and can only be reached through cyberspace. The issue of cost and of people to implement the idea are not necessarily barriers if the Lord is in it.

In summary, the three recommendations for improving the *7 Discoveries* addressed two areas in the book: contents and presentation. The recommendations about

³⁴⁰ Bruce Wilkinson, *The 7 Laws of the Learner* [Kit] [Sound Cassette] 1988, cassette 3.

giving more a hook to the first two chapters and adding more examples of application will improve the contents of the book. The second area in the recommendations had to do with the presentation of the book. The suggestion for more graphics affects presentation and led to further thinking on other media that could be used for publishing this tool for pre-discipleship.

V. Further Thinking on 7 Discoveries and Pre-discipleship

The original intent of the pilot study was to learn how the *7 Discoveries* could be improved especially in terms of the content and its impact on the readers. That happened, but the results were more wide reaching than anticipated. The recommendation on how to improve on the presentation of the book led to insights on other ways to improve the usefulness of the book and to support adoption of pre-discipleship as a tool. Conversations with Christian leaders, pastors, missionaries, and evangelists have affirmed the value of a number of the ideas including the following possibilities.

One possibility is to have the book translated into more languages. Currently, the book is available in English, Bengali, traditional Chinese, and Spanish. The *7 Discoveries* was translated into Spanish by a missionary who has been using the *7 Discoveries* to bring people into the kingdom in Uruguay. Many other missionaries who have seen the *7 Discoveries* have asked for translations into the languages they use.

Another suggestion is that a book should be written that explains the history, theology, and practice of pre-discipleship in order to provide a foundation for the use of the *7 Discoveries*. Without the understanding of the revolutionary theology and philosophy of pre-discipleship that lay behind the *7 Discoveries*, some may assume that *7 Discoveries* is just another of many evangelistic tools. A greater awareness of pre-discipleship in the body of Christ will create acceptance of this tool that bring people into the kingdom.

Building on the previous thought, a workshop or seminar on pre-discipleship should be fully developed to help those who want to use the tool. Pastors, leaders, and the Christian community can be trained to understand and implement the ministry of pre-discipleship. Many in the body of Christ feel uncomfortable with certain forms of encounter evangelism though they may practice it out of guilt or commitment to the Lord

because they have no alternatives for sharing their faith. The Christian community is more than ready and willing to embrace evangelism that is natural, non-threatening, engaging, and steady, and that respect the conversion process.

Another thought concerning the future of *7 Discoveries* and pre-discipleship is to develop a strategy for teaching the theology of pre-discipleship in order to help churches use this tool. It is one thing to develop a theory about a theology on an aspect of evangelism with a tool to implement it, but it is better also to provide people with practical steps in understanding, and executing the contents of this research and in training others to use it. The theology of pre-discipleship may begin to gain acceptance at a workshop level, but until it is practiced and experienced will the body of Christ gain a true understanding of pre-discipleship in the Christian community? The strategy of teaching pre-discipleship to local churches may incorporate other means of outreach in the local church and the use of the *7 Discoveries* as a tool to supplement their evangelistic efforts.

The ideas generated on further ways to develop the *7 Discoveries* and pre-discipleship also revealed possible areas for further research. The sample pilot study paves the way for future studies on the effectiveness of pre-discipleship in making mature disciples. Further research may address the question of whether pre-discipleship can reduce the odds of one disciple being produced from one thousand people who hear the gospel, a figure mentioned in chapter three. The development and teaching of the theology of pre-discipleship will come under scrutiny as the use of pre-discipleship spreads. Lord willing, the book will be able to stand any tests of the tool and become a well-used instrument in bringing many into the kingdom.

VI. Conclusions from Research on Pre-discipleship

This thesis attempted to address the question: *“How significant is pre-discipleship in Christian conversion and the discipleship-making process and, if it is significant, what makes the approach effective?”* The study was divided into five related questions. The first question is *what are the theological and biblical factors that define pre-discipleship?* The biblical and theological research concluded that pre-discipleship was the norm among the Jewish and Gentile believers in the New Testament. It was shown that the

conversion process of the followers of Jesus, the images of the new birth, preparing the soil, entering the narrow gate, and counting the cost all had a part in defining pre-discipleship.

A second related question is *how does pre-discipleship relate to the processes of evangelism, conversion, and discipleship?* The literature review affirmed that pre-discipleship is a valid form of process evangelism. It also showed that pre-discipleship can play a significant role in the conversion process of a seeker. The study also showed that many factors that make up pre-discipleship are the same factors that make up discipleship. The study reveals that pre-discipleship can lead into discipleship.

A third question is *what must a seeker understand and experience in the pre-discipleship process before they make a commitment to Christ?* The study discovered that seekers who make a commitment to Christ need to have a basic understanding of God, his word, Jesus, Christian love, Christian forgiveness, and the gospel. The study has also revealed that seekers who learn through interactive dialogue in Christian community are more likely to experience transformation in their faith.

A fourth question is *how can the educational process of pre-discipleship best be conducted to enhance proper conversion and discipleship?* The focus on adult education affirmed the practice of using pre-discipleship in Christian history. As noted, the research showed that the practice of teaching in the pre-discipleship process is best conducted in an experiential, participatory setting in the context of community.

A fifth question is *what is a sound curriculum for effective pre-discipleship?* The study has revealed that the *7 Discoveries* is a sound curriculum for effective pre-discipleship first because it addresses the major issues required for discovering Christianity, which are referred to in the third question. Second, it allows the seeker to have the time to engage in the conversion process. Third, it has been effective in the pilot studies, in which half the seekers have made a commitment to Christ. The recommendations from the study will be seriously considered for improving this pre-discipleship tool.

In conclusion, if the Christian church is serious about making disciples of all nations, it must embrace transformation as a process that takes time for many. Jimmy Long makes a case for such a process:

Christians in the past treated the spiritual journey like a hundred-yard dash. The one who pursued a strategy of doing the right things, such as Bible study, prayer, reading Christian literature, attending church services, participating in a small group, and continued doing all these things at the same pace throughout life would complete the race a mature Christian. Anyone who stumbled along the way would try to correct by doing even more of the above activities. This strategy just does not work any more, if it ever did. It is based on doing (certain activities) versus being. It is based on external activities, not internal transformation. It is also based on a linear view of sanctification that presupposes an ever-upward growth pattern moving from immaturity to maturity with little or no deviation from the norm.³⁴¹

The church has witnessed many failed efforts in trying to bring people into the kingdom of God. Today's churches have become institutionalized and organized in such a way that attempts to make disciples are often mechanical and impersonal. Discipleship author Bill Hull pointed out, "The modern church is more mired in institutionalism than its first-century counterpart. Whereas the early Christian resisted change because he experienced a vibrant, caring environment, today many resist expansion because it threatens their power base."³⁴²

Christians feel powerless to stem the tidal wave of ineffectiveness in discipleship making, such as the shift away from away from discipleship practices of the first century. As well, ministry often ends up being more politically than theologically driven. Hull describes being "haunted" by the impact of institutionalism.

"Something is wrong," I said. "It has been tormenting me for several years. All the formulas, strategic planning, mission statements and visionary sermons are not making disciples." Indeed, I was haunted by it. Where was the personal transformation after all the effort we put into weekend services, Bible studies, small groups, and outreach events? We were stuck in the same rut that so many churches find themselves in — religious activity without real transformation.³⁴³

After wrestling with the issue of discipleship as a pastor, Hull concluded that

³⁴¹ Long, 176.

³⁴² Hull 91.

³⁴³ Bill Hull, "It's Just Not Working," *Leadership*, Summer 2005, 26.

True, there were many in the church who did not make this commitment to a structured plan of discipleship. I recognize now that discipleship is a way of life, not a program. It is about community and relationships and an environment of grace. So those who did not “choose the life” were not to be devalued. As their pastor I was called to love them as well. Part of the transformation in our church included extending and receiving this kind of acceptance.³⁴⁴

The frustration that those like Hull express about the disciple-making process indicates that the church has thought little about the disciple-making process among the lost. If transformation is the key to effective discipleship making, it is also the key to evangelism.

Transformation, not church attendance, is the desired result in evangelism. Yet, Christians often settle for a sinner’s prayer, regular attendance at church, and a small change in habit as substitutes for transformation. Gordon Smith reminds the Christian community that transformation is “the goal of all of the church’s life and thus of theological reflection.”³⁴⁵

Evangelism that leads to transformation takes time and patience. Biblical evangelism included some form of pre-discipleship, a form of process evangelism. This, however, does not mean there is no place for encounter evangelism. A synergy must exist between encounter evangelism and process evangelism that acknowledge the time and energy it takes to bring a person to Christ. James Jauncey testifies,

My own experience has been that it takes anywhere from six months to two years before a significant decision can be expected. Not all of this time is required to gain the necessary understanding of the person. Much of it will be necessary for the development of rapport and belongingness . . . Just buttonholing a stranger, witnessing to him and pressing for a decision will likely do more harm than good. Most responsible people react negatively and often quite violently to this kind of assault. It shows a fundamental lack of respect for human dignity and personality.³⁴⁶

³⁴⁴ Ibid, 28.

³⁴⁵ Gordon T. Smith, 20.

³⁴⁶ James H. Jauncey, *Psychology for Successful Evangelism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1973), 122–123.

Yet there are those in the Christian community who seem more concerned about church attendance than transformation. We live in a world where people come to church for various reasons. Some attend church to worship God. Others come out of habit and routine. Some genuinely come seeking for truth. The Buddhist man mentioned earlier wanted something more. When he first heard the gospel, he was still content with being a Buddhist. However, after a series of studies in *7 Discoveries*, the Buddhist man became a Christian and was baptized. Many like this Buddhist seeker need to go through a pre-discipleship process before they can follow Jesus.

The need for pre-discipleship is evident. Making disciples of all nations must include this pre-discipleship process, because it leads to transformation and is biblical and effective in the process of conversion. It is conceivable for people come to Christ through a matrix of pre-discipleship applications involving relationships, accountability, spiritual disciplines, and ministry. In the past, the efforts put into evangelistic-type meetings left little lasting impact. An evangelistic meeting that leads into a pre-discipleship process and in co-operation with the Holy Spirit might be the key to transforming results. The *7 Discoveries* can be a tool used in this process. It is time to put new wine in new wineskins in today's evangelistic efforts. It is time for pre-discipleship.

The arks of modern civilization list badly. Our sundered society, buckling morality, criminal depravity have done more than just threaten to submerge modern civilization and modern culture. Like the Titanic, the modern world has taken on water and is sinking fast . . . It's time to build new arks — or as Jesus would say, create "fresh wineskins."³⁴⁷

³⁴⁷ Sweet, 23.

Appendix 1: Stages of Spiritual Development

	Fowler	Loevinger	Helminiak	Prochaska
Ages of Development	Faith Development	Ego Development	Spiritual Development	Transtheoretical Theory of Change
Infancy (1 -2)	Pre-stage: Undifferentiated Faith	Pre-social		Precontemplative Stage
Early Childhood (2-6)	Intuitive-Projective	Symbiotic Stage Impulsive Stage		
Childhood (7 -12)	Mythical-Literal	Self-Protective Stage		
Adolescence (13-21)	Synthetic- Conventional	Conformist Stage	Conformist Stage	Contemplative Stage
	Transition	Self-Aware Level	Conscientious Conformist Stage	Preparation Stage
Young Adulthood (21 – 35)	Individual- Reflective	Conscientious Stage Individualistic Level	Conscientious Stage	Action Stage
Adulthood (35 -60)	Conjunctive	Autonomous Stage	Compassionate Stage	Maintenance Stage
Maturity (60 +)	Universalizing	Integrated Stage	Cosmic Stage	

Appendix 2: Advertisement for Community Pilot Study

Hello Neighbour,

Are you dissatisfied with where you are in life? Have you gained all the toys that you wanted, but still feel you lack something more? Have you made many friends and are haunted by an unexplained loneliness? Have you ever wondered about God but were too afraid to visit a church? Have you always wondered about spiritual matters, but do not know where to go?

My name is Kai and maybe we can help each other. I have written a simple book introducing readers to the basics of Christianity. The book is called “7 Discoveries” helping addressing questions such as: Does God really exist? Is the Bible really the Word of God? What is the Bible all about? Who is Jesus Christ? What is true love? What is real forgiveness? What is the Good News?

I need a group of people (who are not Christians) to meet with me in a small group on **Monday nights (starting October 16, 2006 at 7:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.)** for seven weeks to discuss the “7 Discoveries.” A copy of the book will be given to each participant at no cost. Your feedback will be invaluable to me so that I can know how I can improve on the book before it is published. The study will be at the **Angus Glen Community Centre** (3990 Major Mackenzie Drive East). This study is designed for those who are interested in learning about Christianity. I will bring the snacks. There will be no obligations to become a Christian or to join a church after these sessions. Who knows, you may even walk away in the end with new friends. If you are interested, please contact me at **(416) 648-8627**. There will be a limit to the number of people that can participate in this study. Please register as soon possible.

Sincerely,

Kai Mark

7 Discoveries

By

Kai Mark

Preface

We are all on a spiritual journey. Some do not realize that they are on a journey. Others deny ever being interested in their journey. Some feel that they are seeking in their journey; while others feel they have traveled far.

I certainly am not even close to arriving in my spiritual journey. I still have much more to discover, digest, and do in my relationship with God. God is a reality in my life and it is my desire the you will discover Him. Wherever you are in your spiritual path, I pray that *7 Discoveries* will help you in your journey. May you discover the Lord and be blessed in your journey!

Kai Mark

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Discover God

Who is God? Is it reasonable to believe that God exists? How can anyone know for sure that God exists? Can we logically conclude that God exists without a leap of faith? Is there evidence that supports His existence? Is God relevant to my life?

People today are seeking out a purpose of life. Many who have tried to find it in achievements, money, popularity, relationships, fame, and other avenues find themselves on a dead end street. There is emptiness in life when God is not a factor.

The story was told of a New York police officer who saw a man standing on a bridge contemplating suicide. As the policeman approached the suicidal man, the officer asked the man to give him ten minutes of his time to be convinced why life is worth living. After ten minutes, the man could then try to convince the officer why he thought life was not worth living. If, at the end of twenty minutes, the policeman could not convince the man that life was worth living, then he would let the man jump. It was said that after twenty minutes of discussion together on the purpose of life, the officer and the man joined hands and both jumped off the bridge.

God is a significant factor in our meaning and purpose in life. In fact, when we move closer towards God in our spiritual journey, we will discover it is all about God. Our purpose in life was never about us. It was always about God.

But then, how can we know that God exists? Philosophers and theologians -- from Plato, Aristotle, Augustine and Aquinas to Descartes, Kant, Kierkegaard and Schaeffer, and others -- have been in deep discussions concerning the existence of God for centuries. We can glean from some of their thoughts and mental reasoning that God exists. The following are philosophical discussions that give evidence for the existence of God. The purpose of highlighting this evidence is not to engage in deep philosophical discussions about the existence of God, but to assure the reader that believing in God is not an anti-intellectual pursuit.

I. The Evidences for the Existence of God

A. The Evidence from Cause and Effect

Plato observed that all things in this universe move.³⁴⁸ Whatever moves is either moved by something else, or is self-moved. There are self-movers and a Supreme self-mover known as God. Aristotle, building on Plato's reasoning of a Supreme self-mover, argued that this pointed to a First Cause.³⁴⁹ For every effect, there is a cause. There is an Ultimate Cause, or a First Cause, which many call God.

Assuming that we live in this enormous moving universe, as Plato and Aristotle reasoned, then there must be a Mover that moves this universe; a Supreme self-mover or an Ultimate Cause we call "God." The psalmist writes: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display

³⁴⁸ Plato, *The Collected Dialogues*.

³⁴⁹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book XII, ch. 8.

knowledge.” (Psalm 19:1-2) When one sees the vastness of this universe, one must begin to ponder whether it existed by chance or by the cause of a Supreme Creator.

B. The Evidence from Design

William Paley (1743-1805), the philosopher, made the observation that a watch with all its complex design must have a watchmaker.³⁵⁰ Following the same thought, one must conclude from seeing the numerous delightful designs in the universe that there must be a Master Designer. Where there is a picture, there is an artist; where there is a design, there is a designer.

When you look under a microscope, you can tell the difference between a plant cell and an animal cell by the design. Our universe is full of beauty, order, and symmetry. It would actually take more faith to believe that this universe came about by chance than to believe in a Master Designer. The psalmist said, “In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands.” (Psalm 102:25)

C. The Evidence from Morality

Everyday we make moral judgements. Everyday we decide what is right or wrong. Every one of us has some standard of right and wrong that makes us a moral being. The fact that moral laws are part of the human tapestry of society gives evidence that we are created beings of a divine plan rather than creatures of random chance. The philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) writes: “Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe...the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.”³⁵¹

The moral law within the hearts of men gives evidence to the existence of God. The apostle Paul writes: “Since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.” (Romans 2:15)

D. The Evidence from the Bible

The Bible begins with God. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1) The Bible does not start by trying to explain or prove God’s existence. It just assumes the existence of God.

The Bible also claims to be the Word of God. “For the Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12) If the Bible is truly the Word of God, then it is tremendous evidence for the existence of God. The real issue is whether the

³⁵⁰ William Paley, *The Works of William Paley*, (London: William Smith, 1842) 25ff.

³⁵¹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 166.

Bible is the inspired Word of God or not. This will be the topic for the next session.

E. The Evidence from Jesus

Jesus, the most respected of all spiritual leaders, spoke of and related to God as His Father. He said: "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16) Jesus claimed that He and the Father are so close that when one gets to know Jesus, he or she knows the Father as well. Jesus told His disciples that the way to know God the Father is through Himself. Jesus said: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him." (John 14:6-7)

There are other evidences that could be brought up for discussion to support the existence of God. However, the purpose of this section is to show that it is not unintelligent to believe in God. Seekers are encouraged to search and find more evidences of God for themselves.

II. The Attributes of God

When Christians say that they believe in God, what kind of God are we talking about? God brings up all kinds of images in all kinds of cultures. Some people see God as an angry tyrant to be avoided. Other people see God as a cosmic Santa Claus checking his list to see who's naughty or nice. There are those who believe God created the world and went on vacation. There are others who are so afraid to live because they think God is there to pounce on their every mistake in life. What kind of God are Christians talking about? What are the characteristics of man that are attributed to God? The following are some key snap shot pictures of the God of the Bible.

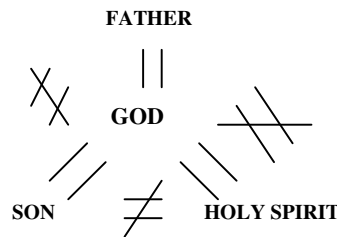
A. God is One

The God of the Bible, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is one God. He is not God among gods. There are no other true gods. "This is what the LORD says, Israel's King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God." (Isaiah 44:6) "The LORD our God, the LORD is one." (Deuteronomy 6:4)

B. God is Triune God

The Bible clearly teaches that there is only one God. However, the Godhead is described as three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. There is overwhelming evidence in Scripture that shows us that God is the Father, God is the Son, and God is the Holy Spirit -- yet one God. This is a mystery about God that would take an eternity for us to truly comprehend.

A logical question to start with is: “Did God create man or did man create God?” If man created God, then he would create a Supreme Being that is within his own understanding. The evidence of man creating god is seen in idolatry. Men who create god or gods create beings they can picture. However, if God created man and revealed Himself, then the finite mind of man begins comprehending the infinite nature of God.



We see in Scripture that God is the Father. Jesus taught us to pray to “our Father in heaven.” (Matthew 6:9) We also see in Scripture that God is the Son. Jesus claimed to be God when He said, “I and the Father are one.” (John 10:30) The Jews at the time knew what Jesus was saying. They tried to stone Jesus “for blasphemy, because you (Jesus), a mere man, *claimed to be God.*” (John 10:33) And thirdly, Scripture reveals to us that the Holy Spirit is God. “Now the LORD is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.” (II Corinthians 3:17)

C. *God is Eternal*

God is free to act within the limitations of time and beyond the limitations of time. He is the Author of time and exists beyond time. “Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.” (Psalm 90:2)

D. *God is Infinite*

Another attribute of God is that He is infinite. He transcends all limitations that time and space imposes. God has always existed without restrictions. He reveals Himself as “I AM WHO I AM.” (Exodus 3:14)

E. *God is Everywhere Present*

God is described as *omnipresent* -- meaning *everywhere present*. This is another description of how the infinite God relates to finite space and time. The psalmist understood this when he writes, “Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.” (Psalm 139:7-8)

F. God is All-Powerful

God is described as *omnipotent* -- meaning *all-powerful*. The infinite power of God is seen in the existence of all things as a result of His will. The will of God is unlimited in contrast to the restrictions of the will of man. "Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit." (Psalm 147:5)

G. God is All-Knowing

God is described as *omniscient* -- meaning *all-knowing*. In contrast to the finite mind of man, the omniscience of God comprehends all things, whether they are things in the past, present, or future. He also understands the things that are possible as well as the actual things. The Lord said, "I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come." (Isaiah 46:10)

H. God is Unchanging

God, in His being, is not capable of change in His quality of being. He could not be less or more than He already is. He said, "I the Lord do not change." (Malachi 3:6) God is described as "the Father of heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows." (James 1:17)

I. God is Holy

God is described as a holy God who is pure and sinless. The Bible tells us that "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all." (I John 1:5) God commands His people to "be holy, because I am holy." (Leviticus 11:45)

J. God is Just

Another characteristic of God is that He is just. He cares about justice and He will bring His judgment. The Bible tells us that a day will come when God "will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed." We will all face the judgment of God some day, "just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment." (Hebrews 9:27)

K. God is Sovereign

The Bible teaches that "the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men." (Daniel 4:25) God is more than just a Ruler. He has absolute authority over all creation. Everything within and outside time and space is under His control. "Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Your, O LORD is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. Wealth and

honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all. (I Chronicles 29:11-12)

L. God is Truth

God is our standard of truth. He advances and confirms that which is true. He is also faithful to His promises and executes His warnings. “Let God be true, and every man a liar.” (Romans 3:4)

M. God is Good

One attribute related to God’s holiness is His goodness. God is good in His nature and is the source of all that is good. “Taste and see that the Lord is good.” (Psalm 34:8)

N. God is Love

Another image of God is the picture of the Heavenly Father who loves His children. We are told that “God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.” (I John 4:16) “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

O. God is Jealous

The jealousy of God is generally misunderstood. Often, jealousy in the human context is a negative trait. But the jealousy of God is a holy trait. The jealousy of God is zeal in a loving relationship. It is a zeal that protects the object of love from harm, and to avenge it when broken. This godly jealousy is a positive virtue often found in a healthy husband-wife relationship. God’s love for us is so pure that anything that comes in between us raises a passion in God to protect or avenge us. The jealousy of God is often revealed in the context of idolatry. “You shall not bow down to them (idols) or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God...” (Exodus 20:5)

P. God is Faithful

Another aspect of God’s love is His faithfulness. His love is described as “new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” (Lamentations 3:23) God’s faithfulness shows us that His love for us is as loyal as a mother’s love is towards her young.

Q. God is Merciful

A well-known aspect of God’s goodness and love is His mercy. When God is merciful to us, He does not give us the punishment that we deserve for

our sins. He says, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.” (Exodus 33:19)

R. God is Gracious

Just as mercy is not getting what we deserve, grace is receiving what we do not deserve. God has given us salvation and more, which no one deserves. “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.” (Titus 2:11)

III. The Acts of God

The snapshot images of God in the Bible paint a picture of a loving and holy Being who is active in our world. The following are the things that God has done and is still doing:

A. He Creates

God is our Creator. He created the universe and He created mankind. “So God created man in His own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:27)

B. He Saves

God is the author of our salvation. He plans and works so that our sins can be forgiven. He tells His people: “I, even I, am the Lord, and apart from me there is no savior.” (Isaiah 43:11)

C. He Reigns

The Sovereign Lord reigns and has Providence, or divine guidance, over everything. He works out every detail for His eternal purposes. “The Lord reigns, let the nations tremble; he sits enthroned between the cherubim, let the earth shake.” (Psalm 99:1)

D. He Responds

God is an interactive God. He listens and responds to our prayers. God may sometimes say no to our requests, but He always responds to the voices of His children. “Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.” (Jeremiah 33:3)

E. He Works

God works supernaturally in a natural world that He has created. His supernatural dealings are seen as miracles in our finite understanding. When

God works in us, we experience changed lives, forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation -- in other words, a miracle. The purpose of God's supernatural works is to lead us to this great salvation that He has provided. "God also testified to it (salvation) by signs, wonders and various miracles..." (Hebrews 2:4)

IV. The Glory of God

When we see glimpses of who God is and some of the things that He is doing, we see God in His glory. Often, when we think of "glory," we think of honour and grandeur. The glory of God in Scripture often refers to the ultimate revelation of God's being, nature, attributes, and character. Often the glory of the Lord implies the presence of God among His people.

The glory of the Lord was first mentioned when God revealed His glory to the grumbling Israelites in the desert, shown in a cloud as evidence of His presence (Exodus 16:1-10). The cloud led the Israelites to Mount Sinai where the glory of the Lord settled (Exodus 24:15-18). Moses wanted to see God's glory and got to see a portion of it (Exodus 33:12-34:35). The glory of the Lord eventually filled the tabernacle as a visual reminder of the presence of God to the Israelites during their travels. The cloud of the Lord led the Israelites by day, and the fire in the cloud led them by night (Exodus 40:34-38). When the temple of the Lord was finally built, we read that "the glory of the Lord filled his temple." (I Kings 8:11)

The Israelites worshipped the Lord in the temple; however, they were also involved in idolatry. The Lord sent them prophet after prophet to warn them against their idolatry, but they refused to obey. Their sin eventually caused the glory of the Lord to leave the temple (Ezekiel 10).

Not much is said about the glory of the Lord until the time of the birth of Jesus, when an angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds and "the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified." (Luke 2:9)

The Lord told the prophet Habakkuk: "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." (Habakkuk 2:14) Let us in our discovery of God realize that believing in a Sovereign Creator is not committing intellectual suicide. Let us discover who God is and how He wants to interact with us. Let us begin to see His glory and His presence in our lives!

Questions To Ponder

1. Does it take more faith NOT to believe in God?
2. How does your understanding of God compare to how He reveals Himself through the Bible?
3. What aspect of God gets your attention?
4. Since God is an interactive Being, in what supernatural way would you like to see Him work in your life?
5. Do you desire to get a glimpse of the glory of God? How much do you truly want to experience His presence?

Discover the Word of God

Two of the biggest ironies in history relate to the Bible. In 303 A.D., the Roman emperor, Diocletian, issued an edict to destroy Christians and their sacred book. Thousands of Christians died for their faith and scores of Bibles were burnt up and destroyed. However, Diocletian's edict to destroy the Bible was reversed by the next emperor, Constantine. Constantine became a Christian and 25 years after Diocletian's edict, he commissioned Eusebius to prepare 50 copies of the Scriptures, at the expense of the government.

A French atheist, Voltaire, traveled the world speaking against the Bible. He said, "It took centuries to build up Christianity, but I'll show how one Frenchman can destroy it within 50 years." He predicted that the Bible would be reckoned an antiquated curiosity within a hundred years. Fifty years after his death the Geneva Bible Society bought his house and printing press and proceeded to produce thousands of Bibles. His own house became the headquarters for the Geneva Bible Society. Voltaire's brilliant work is now a compilation of antiquated curiosities.

The Bible is certainly a unique book. It was written over a 1,500-year span, and over 40 generations. There were over 40 different authors from different walks of life: kings, political leaders, peasants, philosophers, fishermen, herdsmen, doctors, and tax collectors, to name a few. The Bible was written on three continents: Asia, Africa, and Europe. It was written at different times in different places: in a prison, in a palace, in the wilderness, all expressing different moods. The Bible is still the all-time bestseller, the world's most widely circulated book, in at least 1,300 languages. It is also the most loved book, and the most hated book. Men have died because of it. Emperors and kings have sought to destroy it.

Some crucial questions regarding the Bible need to be asked: Is the Bible divine revelation? Is the Bible truly "the Word of God?" In this rapidly changing age of scientific and technological advances, can we be sure that God speaks through the Bible? And if the Bible is the Word of God, what does it mean to us today? The following points about the Bible are certainly worthy of consideration.

I. The Evidences Showing that the Bible is the Word of God

A. *Consider logic*

Is it logical to believe that the Bible is the Word of God? Consider what Dr. Bernard Ramm writes about the Bible:

No other book has been so chopped, knifed, sifted, scrutinized, and vilified. What book on philosophy or religion or psychology or *belles lettres* of classical or modern times has been subject to such a mass attack as the Bible? With such venom and skepticism? With such thoroughness and erudition? Upon every chapter, line and tenet? The Bible is still loved by millions, read by millions, and studied by millions... It still remains the most published and most read book in the world of literature.³⁵²

³⁵² Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Christian Evidences* (Chicago: Moody, 1953), 232-33.

The fact that the Bible creates so much positive and negative interest could be that the author of the Bible is God Himself. If God is an interactive God, He certainly would then want to communicate with His creation. It is not unreasonable to believe that the Sovereign Lord who creates and reigns in the universe could leave us some form of revelation. The Bible is His revelation.

At least 2,700 times in the Old Testament, the prophets claimed that they were quoting God. “Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth! For the Lord has spoken.” (Isaiah 1:2) “The word of the Lord came to me, saying...” (Jeremiah 1:4) “This is what the Sovereign Lord says...” (Ezekiel 20:30) We must conclude with reason that these prophets were either liars, deceivers, insane men, deceived men, or they were actually quoting God. It is not beyond logic to believe that the Bible is the Word of God.

B. *Consider history*

The Bible contains many facts of history, including details such as names, places, and dates. Such data makes the Bible historically verifiable. We can check the accuracy of the Bible against historical and scientific data outside the Bible. The historical reliability of the Bible implies that the contents of the Bible were not the imagination of any individual. In fact, the agnostic historian, H. G. Wells writes:

Almost our only sources of information about the personality of Jesus are derived from the four gospels, all of which were certainly in existence a few decades after his death. Here is a man. This part of the tale could not have been invented.³⁵³

The historical accuracy of the Bible is significant compared to other sacred writings. Author G. B. Hardy writes in his book, *Countdown*:

When you consider the great writings of the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Greeks and the Romans, how they are saturated with mythology, superstition, and fantasy...replete with scientific blunders, surely it is impossible the Bible could escape without error. Still it stands without a single proven error after thirty-four centuries of scholarship.³⁵⁴

If the Bible is the Word of God, then it must speak accurately about the events and data in history. Any information in the Bible that contradicts any historical fact would give evidence that this is not revelation. The historical accuracy of the Bible proves otherwise.

³⁵³ H. G. Wells, *The Outline of History*, 420.

³⁵⁴ G. B. Hardy, *Countdown* (Chicago: Moody, 1972), 34.

C. *Consider archaeology*

The accuracy of Bible is mainly verified by the science of archaeology. Author Jack Cottrell writes:

Through the wealth of data uncovered by historical and archaeological research, we are able to measure the Bible's historical accuracy. In every case where its claims can be thus tested, the Bible proves to be accurate and reliable.³⁵⁵

During the nineteenth century, many scholars saw the Bible as a book full of myths, legends, and fiction. They insisted that Moses could not have written the first five books of the Old Testament because writing was not invented during his day. However, archaeologists have uncovered tablets and inscriptions that dated several hundred years before Moses.

Scholars then also claimed that John did not write the gospel of John, but that it was written some two hundred years later. However, over the past century, archaeology has uncovered a mummy in Egypt, with solid evidence dating it to around the year A.D. 100. When they began to peel away the layers of the mummy at Rylands Library in Manchester, England, they found a large fragment of the Gospel of John. It was proof that this gospel existed at the time of John, a time much earlier than the scholars claimed.

Archaeology's support for the accuracy of the Bible is overwhelming. It is shown to be true to the most obscure detail. Those who dismiss the Bible as a book of myths, legends, and fiction are ignorant of the facts of archaeology, and close their minds to the overwhelming probability that it is revelation.

D. *Consider prophecy*

Further evidence that shows the Bible to be the Word of God is its prophecy. The Bible contains many predictions of events that were fulfilled. The fulfillment of a prophecy validates God's supernatural handprint in this world. Only God knows the future and can predict the future with extreme precision.

Many of the predictions referring to the coming Messiah in the Old Testament were fulfilled by Jesus in the New Testament. Isaiah predicted that he would be born of a virgin, and that came true some 700 years later. Isaiah writes: "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel." (Isaiah 7:14) The prophet Micah, who lived around the same time as Isaiah, predicted that the Anointed One would be born in Bethlehem: "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among

³⁵⁵ Jack Cottrell, *The Authority of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 48-49.

the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.” (Micah 5:2) David predicted the death of the Messiah centuries before it happened. “Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.” (Psalm 22:16-18)

Only God can speak of the future accurately. If the Bible is truly God’s Word, then all of its predictions will come true; not a certain percentage will be fulfilled, but a hundred percent will be fulfilled. “Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come.” (Isaiah 46:9-10)

E. *Consider Jesus*

A fifth evidence that supports the Bible as being the Word of God is the utmost respect Jesus gave the Word. Consider what Jesus said concerning the Scriptures in His day: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the law until everything is accomplished.” (Matthew 5:17-18)

When Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, He used the Word of God as authority over the enemy. Jesus quoted the Old Testament and said: “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” (Matthew 4:4)

In the first recorded public statement by Jesus, He went into the synagogue, took the Word of God and read from Isaiah. He read: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.” (Luke 4:18-19)

Jesus saw divine revelation as truth and authority. When a certain sect, the Sadducees, tried to trap Jesus because they did not believe in the resurrection, it is noteworthy how Jesus responded about the Scriptures. “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God... have you not read what God said to you, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?’ He is not the God of the dead but of the living.” (Matthew 22:29-32) If Jesus saw the Scriptures as His authority, how can we ignore such respect for the Word of God?

II. *The Understanding of the Bible Being the Word of God*

The Bible is the very breath of God. “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the

man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (II Timothy 3:17) The idea of “God-breathed” means inspired by God. How does God inspire men to write down His thoughts? “‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’ declares the Lord. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.’” (Isaiah 55:8-9) There is an aspect of mystery in the process of revelation; God inspires different men in different ways.

Isaiah, for example, literally heard the words of God. “The Lord Almighty has revealed this in my hearing.” (Isaiah 22:14) Daniel received revelation from God in a dream. “During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision.” (Daniel 2:19) Paul, who writes a large portion of the New Testament, was certainly inspired. However, we are not sure of the method with which God inspired him. Paul told the Galatians: “I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.” (Galatians 1:11-12)

We do know that God inspires men through the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit of God who moves the men to write down what needs to be written. “Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” (II Peter 1:20-21)

Does this mean that every word in the Bible is true? This is not the necessary the case. The Bible contains a record of historical facts and the revelation of God. A person who tells a lie in Bible is recorded as a lie. When the serpent told Eve that she “will be like God” if she ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, it was recorded as a lie. The truth here is not the lie itself, but that a lie was told.

The inspiration of the Word means that the stories and accounts in the Bible are accurate. It does not mean that God approves of the words or actions of the characters in certain stories. The truth is that there are a number of stories in the Bible are about men and women who are evil and faithless.

There are other times in the Bible when God directly speaks. The words that are from the Lord are not only accurate, but they are to be received as absolute authority. Over 700 times in the first five books of the Bible alone, we find the words “the Lord said.” The inspired Word of God is not only accurate in the circumstances of revelation, but the words given are also true, accurate, and authoritative.

Some people see the Word of God as inspired truth. Although the Bible is inspired and true, it is more than that. Some treat the Word as two-dimensional words on a page, a little more inspired than Shakespeare. However, the Word of God does not exist only in two dimensions. The Word of God is described as “living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12) Every entity that lives exists in at least three dimensions. The Word of God must exist in at least three dimensions.

The Bible also tells us that “the word of our God stands forever.” (Isaiah 40:8) “Your word, O Lord, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens.” (Psalm 119:89) If H.G. Wells is correct in *The Time Machine* by suggesting that the fourth dimension is time, then the eternal Word must exist in or beyond the fourth dimension. It is more accurate to say that the Word of God is a living entity that exists beyond multi-dimensions. Our relationship to the Word must be more than treating it as a body of truth to be grasped, studied, and memorized. We must interact with the Word as a living entity to be loved, cherished, and obeyed.

III. The Implications of the Bible Being The Word of God

Does it matter that the Bible is the Word of God? It matters tremendously whether or not you see the Bible as inspired literature or a living entity. The Living Word must become the authority for our lives. The Bible must guide us, burn the impurities out of us, shape us, feed us, expose us, and dissect us to the position where it will grow in us. Consider the following symbols for the Word of God.

A. The Word is the Law

God’s Word is His law. The psalmist writes: “All your words are true; all your righteous laws are eternal.” (Psalm 119:160) The law reveals to us our sin and guilt before the Holy God. Consider the Ten Commandments from Exodus 20:

1. “You shall have no other gods before me.” (3)
2. “You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.” (4)
3. “You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.” (7)
4. “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.” (8)
5. “Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.” (12)
6. “You shall not murder.” (13)
7. “You shall not commit adultery.” (14)
8. “You shall not steal.” (15)
9. “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.” (16)
10. “You shall not covet...” (17)

The law was given to show that we are lawbreakers. “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.” (James 2:10) We are guilty and condemned by the law. Only when we understand our sinfulness before God can we then realize our need for His mercy and grace. The Apostle Paul said that “the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ.” (Galatians 3:24)

B. *The Word is our Lamp and Light*

The psalmist writes: “Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.” (Psalm 119:105) The kinds of lamps used in the days of the psalmist were lanterns that did not give out much light. The light only illuminated the distance of a single step. However, the light was of utmost importance, especially traveling in unpredictable terrain in the dark. One wrong step could take a person to unexpected injury or death. The Word of God sheds just enough light in our lives for us to know the next step to take.

C. *The Word is like Fire and Hammer*

“Is not my word like fire,” declares the Lord, “and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?” (Jeremiah 23:29) The Lord was speaking against false prophets who preached in the Lord’s name but not with the Lord’s message. They were preaching reckless lies and leading God’s people astray. Fire can be associated with God’s holiness and judgment (Deuteronomy 4:24; Zechariah 13:9). The Word is like a fire that burns up impurities in metal. It will burn up all the impurities in His people. The Word is like a hammer that shatters all those who speak contrary to Him. His Word will be His judgment.

D. *The Word is Food*

Job said: “I have not departed from the commands of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my daily bread.” (Job 23:12) Job saw the words of God as food for growth. The Bible is our daily spiritual food. There are two images that relate to food concerning the Scriptures. The first image is the Word being compared to milk: “Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.” (I Peter 2:2) The second image is the Word being compared to solid food. Paul addressed the Corinthians as spiritual babies because they were not ready for solid food. He writes: “Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly, mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready.” (I Corinthians 3:1-2) In Hebrews, it states: “In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food.” (Hebrews 5:12) The Word of God is seen as food for our daily spiritual diet. It can be the basic teaching of milk or the deep lessons of solid food. The great challenge is to constantly feed on the Word of God.

E. The Word is a Mirror

James compares the Word of God to a mirror. He writes: “Do not merely listen to the Word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the Word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.” (James 1:22-24) Many people hate the Bible because they see in it their own ugliness and sinfulness. The Bible is a mirror exposing to us who we are and revealing to us who we need to be.

F. The Word is a Sword

We read in the Bible, “For the Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edge sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12) The Word is described as a two-edged scalpel that is used for surgery. It acts as an instrument that cuts to our very soul and spirit in major spiritual surgery. Once the Word has dealt with us, we can use the Word as our own weapon against the enemy. “Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.” (Ephesians 6:17)

E. The Word is the Seed of Life

The Bible is seen as seed that is planted in us, producing life. “He chose to give us birth through the Word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all He created.” (James 1:18) This Word is the seed that results in one’s spiritual birth. “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring Word of God.” (I Peter 1:23)

One of the most amazing historical stories that illustrates the impact of the Bible relates to the Mutiny on the Bounty. Fletcher Christian, acting 2nd Lieutenant, on April 28, 1789, had more than half the ship's company joining in a mutiny against Captain Bligh and his party. The Captain and his party were sent adrift, eventually reaching Timor. Fletcher Christian took the Bounty and the rest of the crew to Tahiti, where they had traveled previously. In September of that year, he and eight other men from the Bounty, six Tahitian men, eleven Tahitian women and one child, sailed away. They landed on an uninhabited island, Pitcairn's Island. The ship was burned up and they settled on this island.

The island at first seemed like a paradise. The men even learned how to distill liquor from one of the roots of the plants on the island. But the next five years the paradise became an island of hell on earth. The men were drunk almost all the time, with many occurrences of murder, orgies, violence, and fear. After

four years, only two of the fourteen men were still alive with ten women and some children.

One of the surviving men was Alexander Smith. He discovered the Bible and a Book of Common Prayer from the remains of the Bounty, but he was illiterate. Edward Young, the other male survivor, was dying of consumption, but he taught Smith to read using the Bible, and died in 1801. Alexander Smith continued to read to Bible, and grew to understand it over a period of several years. Seeing the importance of teaching it to others, he began teaching the mothers and the children how to read. Through the reading and obedience to the Word, Smith implemented worship and prayers.

In 1808, Captain Mayhew Folger of an American ship visited Pitcairn's Island. The members of the crew were amazed to find that thirty-five English-speaking people of Polynesian blood lived on the island, all of whom were practicing the Christian faith. British ships later visited Pitcairn's Island, finding an orderly society with no guile, no alcohol, and no crime. They found people who practiced love and were saturated with the Word of God.

The Bible is an amazing book. It is the inspired Word of God! We must begin to read, study, and digest it as God's revelation and authority on our lives. We must learn to interact with the Word and let it to be our light, a fire and hammer to our souls, our daily food, our constant reminder of our sinfulness, and our sword in spiritual battle. We must allow the seed that came into us to grow into spiritual life and maturity. The Bible must become our life and our authority!

Questions To Ponder

1. Does the Bible being the Word of God make sense to you? Why? Why not?
2. Why was it important to note how Jesus treated the Word of God?
3. Do you relate to the Word of God as a living entity or mere words on a page?
4. What image relating to the Word of God connects with you the most?
5. Is the Word of God the authority for your life? Why or why not?

Discover the Bible

One of the greatest challenges today is to understand the Bible. If it is truly revelation from God, then it demands our understanding. The purpose of this lesson is to give an overview -- a big picture of the Bible. A quick journey through the Old and New Testaments will give the traveler a good sense of where things are in the Bible.

I. The Two Testaments

Let us begin by taking the Bible and trying to divide it into manageable sections. We will continue to divide and sub-divide until we can digest the portions of Scripture given to us. It is common practice to focus on a certain passage of Scripture when studying the Bible. Part of the technique in Bible study is analysis, and part of analyzing a passage is dividing and sub-dividing it. Instead of starting with a few verses, or chapters, or books, we will begin with the whole Bible as our text.

The first division in the Bible is the most obvious one: the Old and New Testaments. The entire Bible contains 66 books. About the first 2/3 of the Bible (39 books to be exact) make up the Old Testament. The Old Testament deals with over 4,000 years of history, mostly the history of the Israelites. The last 1/3 of the Bible (27 books exactly) make up the New Testament. The New Testament deals with only about 100 years of history, a very significant part of our history focusing on Jesus Christ.

II. The Old Testament

The 39 books of the Old Testament can be divided into 7 sub-groups. I was taught a simple way of learning the books of the Old Testament by giving it a phone number 593-5593. The first number 5 refer to the first five books of the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These books are known as the Torah (Hebrew for Law). It is also called Pentateuch meaning five books and they set the foundation for the entire Old Testament.

The second number 9 refer to books in the Old Testament about pre-exilic history. The third number 3 refers to the post-exilic history in the Old Testament. A key date to remember in Old Testament history is 586 B.C. The law told the people of God to put Him first in their lives, but they disobeyed. The children of Israel kept worshipping idols and gave their allegiance to other gods. The Lord sent them prophet after prophet to warn them and finally they were captured by the Babylonians and taken into exile in 586 B.C. The pre-exilic history books: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I and II Samuel, I and II Kings, I and II Chronicles; deals with the history before the exile. The post-exilic books: Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther; deals with the history after the exile. There are twelve History books in all in the Old Testament.

The next number 5 is made up of the books of Poetry. There are five poetic books in the Old Testament: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the

Song of Solomon. These poetic expressions speak of how we are to live the inner life.

OLD TESTAMENT		
<u>LAW (5)</u> Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy	<u>POETRY (5)</u> Job Psalms Proverbs Ecclesiastes Song of Solomon	<u>BASIC PROPHECY (5)</u> Isaiah Jeremiah Lamentations Ezekiel Daniel
<u>PRE-EXILIC HISTORY (9)</u> Joshua Judges Ruth I Samuel II Samuel I Kings II Kings I Chronicles II Chronicles		<u>PRE-EXILIC PROPHECY (9)</u> Hosea Joel Amos Obadiah Jonah Micah Nahum Habakkuk Zephaniah
<u>POST-EXILIC HISTORY (3)</u> Ezra Nehemiah Esther		<u>POST-EXILIC PROPHECY (3)</u> Haggai Zechariah Malachi

Diagram 1

The fifth number 5 refers to five books in the Old Testament known as the Major Prophets. These five books that speak of basic prophecy are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel.

The last two numbers, 9 and 3, are what has been refer to by many as the Minor Prophets. The number 9 can be seen as the pre-exilic prophets. Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah are prophets whose ministry was before the exile. The 3 remaining prophets: Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi are seen as the post-exilic prophets because their ministries occurred after the exile. Notice the beauty and symmetry that is in this library of books written by the Lord over so many years.

A. The Books of the Law (5)

The first five books are the books of the Law. Moses writes these books as God inspired him. *Genesis* is a book full of beginnings. It speaks of the beginnings of creation, the world, and man. Genesis tells us about the fall of man and its consequences, seen in the judgments of the flood

and on the tower of Babel. The book tells of the beginnings of the Israelites, God's chosen people, through the lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.

Exodus begins with the Israelites as slaves in Egypt, and describes how the Israelites leave Egypt through the leadership of Moses. God led the Israelites out of Egypt and through many experiences in the wilderness. It was during the wilderness experience that God gave His people the Ten Commandments.

Leviticus is a book of worship that teaches God's people about worship through sacrifices and feasts. *Numbers* is a book with an official count of the people of Israel as they wander through the wilderness. *Deuteronomy* contains three sermons telling the Israelites what God has done for them, what God expects of them, and what God will do for them. It is a second law to God's people reminding them to be holy and obedient to the Lord as their way of life.

BOOKS OF THE LAW (5)

GENESIS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beginnings of creation, fall, flood, and nations • Beginnings of Israel through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph
EXODUS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moses leads Israel out of Egypt
LEVITICUS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worship God through sacrifices and feasts
NUMBERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of Israelites wandering in the wilderness
DEUTERONOMY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The second law on obedience and holiness

Diagram 2

B. The Books of Pre-exilic History (9)

The next nine books of the Old Testament are on pre-exilic history. They cover over eight hundred years of Israel's history (1405-586 B.C.). These history books can be subdivided into two divisions. The first division contains the theocratic books (Joshua, Judges, Ruth) when Israel was a nation, ruled directly by God (theocracy). The second division has the monarchical books (Samuel, Kings, Chronicles), when the Israelites were ruled by kings.

The book of *Joshua* is about God using Joshua to conquer the land of Canaan. *Judges* differs from Joshua as a book in that it focuses on defeat, as opposed to the conquest and victory found in Joshua. God allowed His people to be oppressed because of their sins. A judge is a deliverer whom God raised to deliver Israel out of an oppressor's hand after His people repented from their sins. *Ruth* is a beautiful love story about a Moabite widow who becomes the great-grandmother of David.

I Samuel gives account for the decline in judges, following the lives of Eli and Samuel while showing the rise of kings through the lives

of King Saul and King David. *II Samuel* tells the story of David's reign in Hebron and Jerusalem. *I Kings* tells us about Solomon and the divided kingdom that came after him. The Israelites were divided into two kingdoms: Israel in the north and Judah in the south. *II Kings* shows the fall of the northern kingdom, Israel, by the Assyrians and the fall of the southern kingdom, Judah, at the hands of the Babylonians. *I Chronicles* covers the life and reign of David while *II Chronicles* covers the life and reigns of Solomon and the kings of Judah.

BOOKS OF PRE-EXILIC HISTORY (9)

JOSHUA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Joshua conquers Canaan
JUDGES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Defeated Israel is delivered by judges
RUTH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A love story of Ruth and Boaz
I SAMUEL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The decline of judges and the rise of kings
II SAMUEL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> David's reign in Hebron and Jerusalem
I KINGS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Solomon and the divided kingdom
II KINGS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The fall of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah
I CHRONICLES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The life and reign of David
II CHRONICLES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The lives and reigns of Solomon and the kings of Judah

Diagram 3

C. The Books of Post-Exilic History (3)

The next three books of the Old Testament are books of post-exilic history (Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther). These are restoration books when a remnant of the Jews returned to their homeland after seventy years of captivity in Babylon.

Ezra is a book about restoring the temple of God and the people of God through the leadership of Zerubbabel and Ezra. *Nehemiah* tells a story about a cupbearer of a Persian king who helped to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. *Esther* is a lovely story about a Jewish girl who became the queen of Persia and helped save her people from annihilation.

BOOKS OF POST-EXILIC HISTORY (3)

EZRA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restoring the temple of God and the people of God
NEHEMIAH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem
ESTHER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Jewish girl who becomes a Persian queen

Diagram 4

D. The Books of Poetry (5)

The next five books in the Old Testament that are considered poetic books: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs. The book of *Job* teaches us about God's control in the midst of human suffering. *Psalms* is a collection of songs often sung in worship. *Proverbs*

is a collection of wise sayings, mostly given by Solomon. *Ecclesiastes* is another book by Solomon reflecting on the meaning of life. The *Song of Songs*, also known as the Song of Solomon, is about the wooing and marriage of a shepherdess by a king. Solomon saturated this love song with romantic love.

BOOKS OF POETRY (5)

JOB	• God is in control in the midst of suffering
PSALMS	• A collection of worship songs to the Lord
PROVERBS	• A collection of wise sayings for life
ECCLESIASTES	• Solomon's reflection on the purpose of life
SONG OF SONGS	• A love song about a shepherdess and a king

Diagram 5

E. The Books of Basic Prophecy (5)

The next five books are known as the Major Prophets containing basic prophecy. These books are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel. They are generally longer than the rest of the prophetic books. A prophet was a servant of the Lord called to proclaim the message of God. They often told what the Lord had revealed to him or her concerning the past, present, or future. The book of *Isaiah* speaks much about the judgment of God and ends with hope for the glory of God. The book of *Jeremiah* addresses the spiritual and moral decay of Judah and speaks of God's judgment against her. *Lamentations* is a book of laments by Jeremiah after the fall of Jerusalem. *Ezekiel* is a book that uses the imagery of dry bones to symbolize Judah's spiritually lifeless condition. It also gives hope for the restoration of Israel someday. *Daniel* is a book full of dreams and visions relevant to our history and our future.

BOOKS OF BASIC PROPHECY (5)

ISAIAH	• Isaiah speaks on the judgment and glory of God
JEREMIAH	• Jeremiah speaks out against the spiritual and moral decay of Judah
LAMENTATIONS	• The laments of Jeremiah after the fall of Jerusalem
EZEKIEL	• Ezekiel gives hope to a spiritually dead Judah
DANIEL	• Daniel, the man of prayer and interpreter of dreams

Diagram 6

F. The Books of Pre-Exilic Prophecy (9)

The next nine Old Testament books contain prophecy given before the exile in 586 B.C. These books are Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habbakkuk, and Zephaniah. *Hosea* is a book that compares an adulterous Israel to a faithful Lord. The book of *Joel* predicts an army from the north, which will come like a plague of locusts to pick Judah clean, unless they repent. The book of *Amos* speaks against the

hypocrisy and spiritual indifference in prosperous Israel. *Obadiah* is a book that predicts the destruction of Edom and the deliverance of Israel.

Jonah was a prophet who was swallowed by a great fish after he avoided preaching to the Ninevites. The book teaches about God's mercy to Gentile nations who repent. *Micah* speaks on justice to a society full of injustice. *Nahum* speaks about the destruction of the city of Nineveh at the hands of an army who will enter their city like a flood. *Habakkuk* is a book that questions God and concludes with praise for Him. *Zephaniah* proclaims the Day of the Lord coming on Judah with a promise of restoration in the end.

BOOKS OF PRE-EXILIC PROPHECY (9)

HOSEA	• The faithfulness of God to adulterous Israel
JOEL	• A warning to Judah of the army of locusts who will clean their land
AMOS	• Israel does not measure up to God's plumb-line of righteousness
OBADIAH	• The destruction of Edom and the deliverance of Israel
JONAH	• God's mercy to the Ninevites through Jonah
MICAH	• There will be justice when surrounded by injustice
NAHUM	• Nineveh will be flooded with an army of destruction
HABAKKUK	• Habakkuk questions God and ends up praising Him
ZEPHANIAH	• The Day of the Lord is coming

Diagram 7

G. The Books of Post-Exilic Prophecy (3)

The remaining three books in the Old Testament are prophecy given after the exile in 586 B.C. *Haggai* is a book that exhorts the people of God to rebuild the temple of God and receive the blessing of God. *Zechariah* was a priest who also encouraged the people to continue the rebuilding of the temple of God, with a prediction that the Messiah's glory will one day dwell in it. *Malachi* is the last book of the Old Testament, speaking against the Israelites with unfaithful hearts towards the Lord. The Old Testament ends with a prediction of the coming of the Lord. The people of God had learned very little from their captivity, committing the same kind of sins that resulted in their exile.

THE BOOKS OF POST-EXILIC PROPHECY (3)

HAGGAI	• A call to rebuild the temple of God
ZECHARIAH	• Encouragement to rebuild the temple for the Messiah
MALACHI	• Malachi speaks of Israel's unfaithfulness and the Lord's coming

Diagram 8

III. The New Testament

Four hundred years have passed since the close of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament. The Old Testament centered mainly on God's relationship with the children of Israel, with a promise of a coming Messiah. The New Testament is all about that Messiah (Anointed One). The Messiah is "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:29) The New Testament is all about Jesus Christ.

The 27 books of the New Testament can easily be remembered with a New Testament phone number 593-1135. Consider the fact that the New Testament is built from the Old Testament. It therefore has a similar code (593) or DNA to the Old Testament. The New Testament number will have the same start as the Old Testament. The first number 5 refers to the five books of history in the New Testament. The first four books are known as four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The fifth book is Acts dealing with the ascension of Jesus and early church history. The rest of the New Testament is comprised of letters.

NEW TESTAMENT		
<u>HISTORY (5)</u> Matthew Mark Luke John Acts	<u>LETTER TO INDIVIDUAL (1)</u> Philemon	<u>LETTER TO JEWISH BELIEVERS (1)</u> Hebrews
<u>LETTERS TO CHURCHES (9)</u> Romans I & II Corinthians Galatians Ephesians Philippians Colossians I & II Thessalonians		<u>LETTERS FROM PASTORS (3)</u> James I Peter II Peter
<u>LETTERS TO PASTORS (3)</u> I Timothy II Timothy Titus		<u>LETTERS FROM ELDERS (5)</u> I & II & III John Jude Revelation

Diagram 9

The apostle Paul writes at least thirteen of the New Testament letters dealing with what life that is "in Christ." The second number 9 are nine letters Paul writes to churches in various cities: Romans, I Corinthians, II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I Thessalonians, and II Thessalonians. The next number 3 in the New Testament are associated with pastors. The Old Testament has prophets and the New Testament has pastors. Paul

writes three letters to two pastors: I Timothy, II Timothy, and Titus. The last letter of Paul is associated with the fourth number 1 which was sent to an individual named Philemon.

The last nine books of the New Testaments are letters of encouragement for believers to persevere in their faith. The fifth number 1 is a letter, Hebrews, written to encourage Jewish believers to persevere in their faith. The next number 3 represent books that are the letters James, I Peter, and II Peter written by two pastors. The last number 5 refer to I John, II John, III John, Jude, and Revelation are letters by two elders to encourage believers to persevere in the last days.

A. The Books of History (5)

The first five books of the New Testament are documents of history beginning with the four Gospels, or the Good News. These books are all about Jesus Christ. There are four accounts of Jesus' life: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. All the gospels reveal the life and ministry of Jesus, ending with accounts of His death and resurrection. Each gospel gives emphasis to a different side of Jesus' life. It is like four different newspapers covering the same event, and coming up with stories that are both similar and different.

Matthew writes for the Jewish mind, affirming Jesus to be the Messiah and King. *Mark* presented Jesus as a humble servant of man who did not come "to be served, but to serve." (Mark 10:45) *Luke* was a doctor who presented Jesus as the "Son of Man," emphasizing his perfect humanity. *John* presented Jesus as the "Son of God," revealing His deity.

The other book of history is *Acts* concerning the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the early church, after Jesus ascended into heaven. The book follows the early ministries of the apostle Peter and the apostle Paul. *Acts* follows the church, beginning with the Jews in Jerusalem, to the Jews and Samaritans in Judea and Samaria, and to the Gentiles in the ends of the earth.

BOOKS OF HISTORY (5)

MATTHEW	• Jesus is the King of kings
MARK	• Jesus is the Servant of Man
LUKE	• Jesus is the Son of Man
JOHN	• Jesus is the Son of God
ACTS	• The ministry of the Holy Spirit in the early Church

Diagram 10

B. The Letters of Paul to the Churches (9)

The Apostle Paul writes nearly half the books in the New Testament. The writings of Paul were in the form of letters written to churches, pastors, and to a lay individual. We learn much about the early church and their teachings through these letters inspired by God.

Paul writes nine letters to Christians in the cities of Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, and Thessalonica. Each book presents unique teachings about living the Christian faith “in Christ.” *Romans* is a book about how we can have the righteousness of God, because our debt of sin was paid in full. Paul writes two letters to the believers in Corinth. The first letter, *I Corinthians*, addressed the problems the Corinthian church was struggling with at the time. The second letter, *II Corinthians*, was Paul’s response to the false teachers of the day who questioned his credentials and authority as an apostle.

Galatians is about the freedom believers have in Christ. *Ephesians* talks about living the Christian life in both our belief and behaviour. *Philippians* tells us about the joy believers have in Christ. *Colossians* is all about Christ and our relation to Him.

LETTERS OF PAUL TO CHURCHES (9)

ROMANS	• The righteousness of God
I CORINTHIANS	• The problems in the church
II CORINTHIANS	• Paul’s apostolic credentials and authority
GALATIANS	• Our freedom in Christ
EPHESIANS	• Our belief and our behaviour in Christian living
PHILIPPIANS	• Our joy being in Christ
COLOSSIANS	• Christ is supreme in our lives
I THESSALONIANS	• Excel in faith, because Christ is coming
II THESSALONIANS	• Stand firm and work until Christ comes

Diagram 11

Paul also writes two letters to what was a model church in Thessalonica. *I Thessalonians* was a letter that encouraged the believers to excel in their faith because Christ is coming. *II Thessalonians* responds to the false teaching that Christ has already come. Paul encouraged the believers to stand firm in the faith and work hard until Christ comes.

C. The Letters of Paul to the Pastors (3)

Paul writes three letters to Timothy and Titus known also as the Pastoral Epistles. These books are letters of encouragement on leadership matters with those in Christ. The first letter to Timothy, *I Timothy*, is a letter encouraging young Timothy in his pastoral leadership. The second letter to Timothy, *II Timothy*, was considered to be Paul’s final letter, containing words of wisdom and encouragement to Timothy before his death. *Titus* was also a young minister receiving pastoral advice from Paul on church leadership.

LETTERS OF PAUL TO PASTORS (3)

I TIMOTHY	• Timothy learns about pastoral leadership
II TIMOTHY	• Paul's final words of wisdom and encouragement
TITUS	• Pastoral wisdom on church leadership

Diagram 12

D. The Letter of Paul to an Individual (1)

At the centre of this New Testament phone number is the book of Philemon. *Philemon* is a letter that Paul writes asking Philemon, a slave owner, to forgive his runaway slave. In the midst of all the letters about being “in Christ” this simple letter reveals the full understanding of every good thing we have in Him.

LETTER OF PAUL TO AN INDIVIDUAL (1)

PHILEMON	• Paul encourages Philemon to forgive Onesimus
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Diagram 13

E. Encouraging Letters to Jewish Believers (1)

The last nine books of the New Testaments are encouraging letters to encourage believers to persevere in the their faith. *Hebrews* is a letter by an unidentified author, revealing the superiority and sufficiency of Jesus Christ over any empty religion. It was written to encourage Jewish believers who were waning in their faith.

ENCOURAGING LETTER TO JEWISH BELIEVERS (1)

HEBREWS	• Christ is superior and sufficient
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Diagram 14

F. Encouraging Letters From Pastors (3)

The next three letters in the New Testament were written by the first two pastors in the church in Jerusalem, James and Peter. Just as there were three letters written to pastors, here are three letters written by pastors. These letters were written to encourage believers to persevere in the midst of difficulties. *James*, a half-brother of Jesus, did not believe in Christ until after the resurrection. His letter is a practical approach to the Christian faith.

Peter writes two letters to the Christian community. The first letter, *I Peter*, was written to encourage the believers to continue living for God, knowing that their suffering had a purpose. The second letter, *II Peter*, was a warning against false teachers in the church, and urged believers to be on their guard until Christ comes.

ENCOURAGING LETTERS FROM PASTORS (3)

JAMES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practical Christian living
I PETER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to suffer for God's purpose
II PETER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beware of false teachers among you

Diagram 15

G. Encouraging Letters from Elders (5)

The final five letters of the New Testament were written by two elders of the church to encourage believers to persevere in the faith in the last days. John was also concerned about the false teachers of his day and addressed the issue in his first letter. *I John* is about having true fellowship and assurance of salvation in the midst of false teachings. John's second letter, *II John* is an encouragement to walk in truth and love, but believers are not to welcome the false teachers. *III John* is a personal letter from the apostle John to Gaius, encouraging him to continue showing hospitality to Christian strangers.

Jude was also a half-brother of Jesus, who warned believers of the godless among them and encouraged them to contend for the faith. The last book in the Bible is *Revelation*, a book describing a vision given to John by Jesus about events in the last days.

ENCOURAGING LETTERS FROM ELDERS (5)

I JOHN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • True fellowship and assurance
II JOHN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walk in truth and love
III JOHN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • John encourages Gaius to continue to show hospitality
JUDE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contend for the faith
REVELATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future events in the last days

Diagram 16

A good way to remember the number of books in the New Testament (27) is to take the number of books in the Old Testament (39) and you multiply the two digits ($3 \times 9 = 27$). A good way to remember the New Testament phone number is to multiply the first three numbers (the DNA number) to receive the last three digits ($5 \times 9 \times 3 = 135$).

IV. The Big Picture

What is the big picture of the Bible? If we start in Genesis, we find that God created man in his own image. However, man disobeyed God and was driven out of the Garden of Eden, becoming increasingly wicked. Man became so wicked that God judged the earth with a flood, leaving only Noah and his family. Noah's descendants began to repopulate the earth until there were many people groups. God chose a man named Abram to follow after the Lord to a promised land. Abram became Abraham, the father of many nations. God was to be Abraham's God and the God of the descendants after him. Abraham's son was Isaac, who had

two sons named Esau and Jacob. God changed Jacob's name (which means 'deceiver') to Israel, meaning 'he struggled with God.' The children of Israel became the chosen people who struggled with God.

The Old Testament follows the spiritual journey of the Israelites in their struggle with God. God gave them the Ten Commandments and told them never to worship any idols. Throughout their journey, however, they struggled to be faithful to God. Even after they reached the promised land with Joshua, the Israelites continued to be unfaithful. They wanted a king like all the other surrounding nations, and God gave them King Saul. After the reigns of King David and King Solomon, the Children of Israel were divided into two kingdoms: Israel in the north and Judah in the south. The chosen people of God continued through these times to chase after other gods and idols. The Lord sent them prophet after prophet, but they did not repent. Finally, the Lord allowed them to be destroyed and taken to Babylon for seventy years. It is interesting that after the Israelites returned from exile, we do not read much about them chasing after idols again.

A theme at the heart of Israel's history is the expectation of a coming Messiah, the Anointed One, expected to save the people of God. The Old Testament points to the Messiah, and the New Testament is all about the Messiah (Christ) in the person of Jesus. The Bible is all about Jesus: His life, His death, His resurrection, and His significance in our lives.

Questions To Ponder

1. Have you ever found the Bible to be difficult to understand? Why?
2. What aspect(s) of the Old Testament fascinated you today?
3. What aspect(s) of the New Testament fascinated you today?
4. How does understanding the big picture of the Bible help you to understand it better?
5. What question(s) have you always wanted to ask about the Bible?

Discover Jesus

The core of Christianity centers on Jesus Christ. The Old Testament points expectantly to a coming Messiah. The New Testament is all about that Messiah (Christ) named Jesus. Gandhi said: "I tell the Hindus that their lives will be imperfect if they do not also study reverently the teaching of Jesus." Lord Byron said: "If ever God was man or man was God, Jesus Christ was both." To discover Jesus is to discover what the whole Christian faith is all about. Christianity is a love relationship with Jesus Christ.

I. The Existence of Jesus

A case could easily be made revealing Jesus Christ as the focal point of history. Many distinguished scholars have affirmed the historicity of Christ. H. G. Wells, the famous writer and agnostic, writes concerning Jesus: "Here was a man. This part of the tale could not have been invented." It is impossible to believe in Jesus Christ apart from His history. Writer Michael Green writes: "Once disprove the historicity of Jesus Christ, and Christianity will collapse like a pack of cards." To diminish the existence of Jesus into some myth is to ignore centuries of scholarship and historical evidences that are before us.

II. The Birth of Jesus

Every Christmas, Christians around the world celebrate the birth of Jesus. What was unique about the birth was that Jesus was born of a virgin, thus fulfilling Old Testament prophecy. About seven hundred years earlier, the prophet Isaiah writes: "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel." (Isaiah 7:14) Around the same time, another prophet named Micah predicted the birthplace of the Messiah. He writes: "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." (Micah 5:2)

The virgin birth of Jesus was a not a natural likelihood, but it was a supernatural possibility. If His birth was a normal birth, then Jesus would have been just another special human being. The fact that the Virgin Mary was conceived of the Holy Spirit made Him a very unique child. Even Joseph, who was at the time engaged to Mary, had a hard time accepting Mary's pregnancy as being supernatural. However Joseph did respond positively when an angel told him, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1:20-21) The virgin birth made it possible for Jesus to be both God and man. It was the means through which God could supernaturally become man.

Some time after Jesus was born, Magi (or Wise Men) from the east came to Jerusalem in search of the one born king of the Jews. The Magi in ancient times were known as king makers. Historically, no Persian could be king until they had

mastered the scientific and religious disciplines of the Magi. The Magi's influence and power continued in the Greek and Roman empires, where we encounter this one sect with strong Jewish influence. When Jesus was born, the Magi came and worshipped Him as king.

III. The Life of Jesus

After the visit of the Magi, Joseph took Jesus and the family to Egypt to flee from the evils of King Herod. The family eventually settled in Nazareth, where Jesus grew up. Other than one time -- at age twelve, when Jesus amazed everyone in the temple courts in Jerusalem with his understanding and debates with the wise men of the day -- Jesus lived in obscurity for some thirty years.

The next time we hear about Jesus is when He began His public ministry. John the Baptist introduced the public to Jesus and baptized Him. Then the Spirit led Jesus into the desert where He was tempted by the devil. After forty days in the wilderness, Jesus went throughout Galilee, preaching the message of the kingdom and healing the sick. His first of many miracles was performed at a wedding in Cana, where He turned water into wine.

Jesus cleansed the temple of God in the first recorded visit of Christ to Jerusalem after the start of His public ministry. It was at that time that He interacted with various people, from a religious leader like Nicodemus to the lowly in society like the Samaritan woman. Jesus was open and accepting of all people, no matter who they were in society. He was severely criticized for socializing with "sinners" and with those who were seen as the low life of society.

Much of Jesus' ministry was in Galilee where He used Capernaum as His home base. The ministry of Jesus included many miracles where the blind received sight, the lame walked, those with leprosy were cured, the deaf heard, and the dead were raised. Jesus also preached the good news to the poor and taught great truths through many parables. At the same time, Jesus spent His three years mentoring twelve disciples, who would all desert Him in His time of need.

Jesus eventually traveled to Jerusalem via Perea, ministering as He went. The three years of Jesus' ministry concluded with His final days in Jerusalem, beginning with a triumphal entry into the city on a donkey. It was an entry where crowds of people spread their cloaks and branches on the road to honor Jesus as their king. Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah, who writes some five hundred years earlier: "Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." (Zechariah 9:9)

After Jesus' dramatic entry in Jerusalem, it was recorded that He again entered the temple and cleansed it. He continued to teach His disciples while being challenged by the religious leaders of the day. Later on that week, Jesus and His disciples observed the Jewish Passover, known today as His Last Supper. It was at this feast that Jesus took the bread and the cup and told his disciples of His coming death and the one who would betray Him. After praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was arrested and taken away.

Jesus was taken and tried before both religious and political leaders. He was unfairly condemned to death, being guilty of nothing. Jesus was crucified on the cross and died an innocent man. However, His death was significant because of His holy life. John the Baptist understood that Jesus was a kind of sacrifice for the sins of mankind when he pointed to Jesus and said: "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:29)

Jesus' life was full of acts of kindness, love, mercy, and grace. His selfless teachings astounded the scholars, pierced the hearts of hypocrites, and comforted the humbled. Jesus not only changed the face of history, His was and is history. His life also made an impact that has eternal consequences. Will Durant, an agnostic and former professor at Columbia University, writes concerning Jesus: "That a few simple men should in one generation have invented so powerful and appealing a personality, so lofty an ethic, and so inspiring a vision of human brotherhood, would be a miracle far more incredible than any recorded in the gospels."³⁵⁶

IV. The Death of Jesus

The holy life of Jesus should not have resulted in His death as a common criminal. However, Jesus' death on the cross was the most recorded and analyzed death in history. Those who were closest to Jesus did not hesitate to point out Jesus was sinless. John writes, "...and in him is no sin." Peter quoted Isaiah in reference to Christ saying, "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." (I Peter 2:21-22) Even the enemies of Christ admitted His perfection in life. Judas, who betrayed Jesus, was filled with remorse, saying, "I have sinned...for I have betrayed innocent blood." (Matthew 27:4) A statement from some of those who were responsible for Jesus' death testified: "Surely he was the Son of God!" (Matthew 27:54) To admit that Jesus was the Son of God was to admit that He was as sinless as God was. Even Pilate admitted that Jesus was an "innocent man" (Matthew 27:19) who did not deserve to die.

After Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, He stood for trial six separate times. The first trial was before Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas, immediately after the arrest of Jesus (John 18:12-24). This trial was illegal, being at night and contrary to Jewish law. There were no indictments prepared, no witnesses heard, and no counsel was provided for the defendant. The officials physically abused Jesus when they disagreed with His responses to the questions He was given. Jesus was then immediately brought before Caiaphas, who also tried Him (Matthew 26:57-68; Mark 14:53-65). False witnesses were produced at this trial and Jesus was convicted after he affirmed that He was indeed the Christ. It was recorded that at this trial the religious leaders "spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him and said, 'Prophecy to us, Christ. Who hit you?' " (Matthew 26:67-68)

³⁵⁶ Will Durant, "Caesar and Christ," in *The Story of Civilization* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1944), 3.557.

A third trial was held in the morning, at which Jesus was convicted of blasphemy for claiming to be the Son of God (Matthew 27:1-2; Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66-71). He was then sent to the Roman governor, Pilate, where Jesus was accused of perverting the nation by opposing payment of taxes to Caesar, and claiming to be the King of the Jews. The fourth trial before Pilate was brief since Pilate learned that Jesus was from Galilee and was therefore under Herod's jurisdiction. Pilate sent Jesus to Herod who was in Jerusalem at the time. It was at this trial (Luke 23:8-12) that Jesus was mocked and ridiculed by Herod and his soldiers before being returned to Pilate.

The final trial before Pilate was a travesty of justice. Pilate tried to acquit Jesus and offered to scourge and release Him (Matthew 27:15-26; Mark 15:6-15; Luke 23:18-25; John 18:29-19:16). However, the chief priests and their officials wanted Jesus crucified. Pilate offered them a choice to free Jesus or a known rebel and murderer named Barabbas. They chose to crucify Jesus and release Barabbas. Pilate eventually pronounced the death sentence on Jesus, according to the will of the people. It was at this trial that Pilate had Jesus flogged, a beating so severe that it would have left a typical person barely alive. The soldiers also gave Jesus a crown of thorns, pressed down mockingly into His brow.

Jesus had to carry His own cross until He was too weak from the beating to bear it further. Simon of Cyrene was there and took over for Jesus in carrying the cross to Golgotha ('the Place of the Skull'). It was on that hill Jesus was crucified with two other criminals. Jesus was nailed to the cross He had earlier carried. An inscription was written and fastened to the cross that read: "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." As Jesus hung on the cross at the peak of the day, darkness came all over the land. When He gave up His spirit, the curtain of the temple was torn into two from top to bottom and the earth shook. Jesus lived like no one ever lived, and died like no one has ever died.

Why was it necessary for Jesus to die? Why did He have to die to become our Saviour? In Greek mythology, when Paris abducted Helen of Troy, Agamemnon was put at the head of the expedition to Troy to take back his brother's wife. When the Greek fleet set sail from Aulis, they encountered no winds. They discovered that the reason for the lack of wind was because the goddess Artemis was angry with them for the lack of respect they showed her. Artemis demanded that Agamemnon sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia in order to appease her wrath. When Agamemnon finally sacrificed his daughter, the wrath of Artemis was appeased, and he was allowed to sail to Troy.

Our God is so holy that His reaction to any sin is wrath. Old Testament priests often offered sacrifices to appease, or atone for sins. Jesus is "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29) Some suggest that God could have just snapped His fingers and the world would be all right. Although God has the power to do so, it is not His nature to do so. His holy nature would never compromise with sin. His holy nature means that He must react and deal with sin in a godly manner.

The death of Christ was God's sacrifice for our sins. Instead of man making the sacrifices to appease His wrath, God made the sacrifice for man. Jesus "is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of

the whole world.” (I John 2:2) The death of Jesus satisfied the wrath of God. The penalty was severe. It shows us how serious God views sin. It also shows us how much God loves us in responding to sin in the way He did. “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8)

At the core of the message of Christianity is that Jesus died for our sins. To understand this concept is to understand the concept of debt. The Bible tells us that “the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 6:23) Our sins put us in a great debt before our Heavenly Father. We deserve death as a result of our sins. It is like a beggar owing a king billions of dollars with no way of paying his debt. But the king in this story sacrifices his own Son and pays off the debt of the beggar. The king not only forgives the debt, he gives the beggar millions for a new bank account. The beggar no longer lives as a beggar, but as a rich man.

When we were in the debt of sin, the Father saw us as sinners deserving of death. However, Jesus died for our sins and took our punishment. “But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” (Isaiah 53:5-6) Jesus died as our substitute. He died in our place. “For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body, but made alive by the Spirit.” (I Peter 3:18)

When we believe that Jesus died for our sins, we receive Him as we receive any gift. “Yet to all who receive him, to those who believe in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” (John 1:12) The Father no longer sees us as sinners, but as His children, with the righteousness of Christ. “For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.” (Romans 5:19)

V. The Resurrection of Jesus

The other core message of Christianity is that Jesus rose from the dead. After Jesus died, His body was taken and buried in a tomb owned by Joseph of Arimathea. With so many rumors of Jesus’ disciples’ attempts to steal the body of Jesus, the Pharisees persuaded Pilate to have the tomb sealed and watched by Roman guards. This was recorded to show that Jesus did miraculously rise from the dead in the midst of great opposition.

It was on that Sunday morning when Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb and found it empty. An angel appeared to them and told them: “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he is risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.” (Matthew 28:5-6) The women were overjoyed and quickly shared the news with the disciples. Eventually, Jesus appeared to His disciples several

times after the resurrection, teaching and comforting them. Jesus stayed forty days on the earth after the resurrection before ascending into heaven.

How certain can we be about the resurrection of Jesus? The scholar James Edwin Orr writes: “No single example can be produced of belief in the resurrection of an historical personage such as Jesus was: none at least on which anything was ever founded...the Christian resurrection is thus a fact without historical analogy.”³⁵⁷ The evidence for the resurrection of Christ is too overwhelming to ignore.

A. The Reality of Church

The Christian church started A.D. 32 (Anno Domini, in the year of our Lord) in Jerusalem. The disciples of Jesus were mostly hiding, afraid, and in fear for their lives after the death of Christ. What made these cowardly disciples stand boldly before the people of Jerusalem only weeks later and preach messages that would turn the world upside down? It was the fact that Jesus rose from the dead that changed their hearts and attitudes, giving them the boldness to proclaim the truth. The disciples started what is today the church. The existence of the church today gives evidence that Jesus did rise from the dead.

B. The Reality of Sunday

The first day of the week is Sunday. Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week (Matthew 28:1). Christians in the early church met on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). What changed the large Jewish population from worshipping on the Sabbath (Saturday) to worshipping on a Sunday? The fact that many churches today worship on Sunday gives evidence that Jesus did rise from the dead on the first day of the week.

C. The Reality of Witnesses

There were many witnesses who saw Jesus after his death. All the gospel writers and disciples were witnesses to His resurrection. Paul tells us that there was a time when over 500 people saw Jesus at once (I Corinthians 15:6). This eliminates any possibilities of any kind of hallucinations. The most credible witness was Thomas, who doubted Jesus rose from the dead. When Jesus did appear to Thomas, Jesus asked Thomas to touch His hands where the nails were, and to touch His side where He was pierced by a spear. Thomas said to Jesus: “My Lord and my God!” Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” (John 20:28-29)

³⁵⁷ James Edwin Orr, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (Joplin: College Press, 1972) 224.

D. The Reality of the Empty Tomb

If He did not rise from the dead, where was His body? Skeptics have suggested that the women went to the wrong tomb. If the women went to the wrong tomb, then it would be very easy for the enemies of Jesus to point out the right tomb. The fact that the chief priests tried to bribe the Roman guards to lie about the body being stolen (Matthew 28:11-15) meant that the women did go to the right tomb.

The possibility that the disciples stole the body is inconsistent to their lives. The disciples were cowards who ran away at the first sign of trouble. Even if they attempted to steal the body, it would have been difficult for them to get by the Roman guards and remove the sealed stone. Eventually, every one of the disciples died convinced that Jesus rose from the dead. If they did steal the body, not many of them would die for a lie. Jesus did come out of the tomb supernaturally, and not naturally.

E. The Reality of the Written Word

All the New Testament writers viewed the resurrection as an accepted event. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all recorded the resurrection as a historical fact. Peter told the crowd in Jerusalem that “God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.” (Acts 2:32) The Apostle Paul writes: “Christ has indeed been raised from the dead.” (I Corinthians 15:20) Since all the writers affirm the resurrection of Jesus, this becomes another pillar of evidence to support the fact that Jesus did rise from the dead.

F. The Reality of Christian Experience

The resurrection of Christ means that Jesus is alive and active today. He is not merely limited to the pages of history. He changes the lives of those who follow Him today. He still helps drunkards sober up, thieves to steal no more, those who hate to have a heart of love, and those in darkness to be full of light. Jesus is alive! How He is changing people today is evidence that He is risen.

The resurrection of Christ gives believers many assurances in their faith journey. The first assurance is that we worship a living God. Our deity is not some dead lifeless idol, but alive and involved in our lives. Many other religious leaders lived and died but Jesus rose again. The second assurance is that we know there is life after death. Jesus proved it with His resurrection. The third assurance is that we know there is a resurrection. Jesus said: “Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days.” (John 2:19) Jesus predicted and proved that there is a resurrection. The fourth assurance is that we know that Jesus is who He claims to be. His resurrection gives credibility to His claims. The fifth assurance we have from the resurrection of Jesus is that we know that

there will be a judgement. Scripture is serious when it says that “just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.” (Hebrews 9:27) The sixth assurance we have in the resurrection is that our faith is useful. “And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.” (I Corinthians 15:17)

VI. The Claims of Jesus

The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus made Him very unique. However, it is His unique claims that bear our attention. Jesus claimed to be the “Son of God,” (Matthew 26:63; John 5:25) a claim to deity. The term “son of...” in the Jewish mind did not imply subordination, but equality and identity of nature. “Son of God” is the highest title of deity that only God could possess.

Jesus claimed to be able to forgive sin. “But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...” (Matthew 9:6) Only God could forgive sins. Jesus claimed to judge the world: “And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man...I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.” (John 5:27, 30) Only God can judge the world. Jesus claimed to give eternal life: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” Eternal life is something only God can give.

Jesus also claimed to be sinless. He said, “Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?” (John 8:46) Only the Holy God is sinless. Jesus claimed to be the Savior from sins: “I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins.” (John 8:24) Jesus also claimed to be able to answer prayers: “And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father.” (John 14:13) Only the Sovereign Lord can answer prayers.

Jesus claimed to be the Truth: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6) He also claimed to have all authority. He said to His disciples before He ascended into heaven: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” (Matthew 28:18) He claimed to be one in essence with God: “I and the Father are one.” (John 10:30) The Jews knew exactly what Jesus meant when He said these things and wanted to stone Him. Jesus asked His critics for which miracle He had performed were they were planning to stone Him. The Jews replied: “We are not stoning you for any of these...but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God.” (John 10:33)

All the claims that Jesus made on the earth were references to deity. The conclusion is that Jesus was either a liar, a lunatic, a legend, or He was who He claimed to be, the Son of God. It would be almost impossible for Jesus to have lied because it would be so inconsistent with His holy life and teachings. Jesus could have been a lunatic; however, again the impact of the life and teachings of Jesus does not fit the persona of Jesus being a madman. The possibility that Jesus never made these claims and that His followers just created the idea that He was

God, making Him a legend, ignores many scholarly principles. The conclusion is that He must be as He claimed to be: God in human form. He is truly Lord.

VII. The Presence of Jesus

Jesus not only exists in the writings of our history books, but He also exists in the pages of our newspapers today. He told His disciples that He would be going away from them for a little while, but would one day return: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many room; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.” (John 14:1-3)

Jesus promised His disciples that they would not be alone on this earth. The Holy Spirit will come and be with them and live in them. Jesus said: “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever, the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.” (John 14:16-17)

Christians today have the Spirit of Christ dwelling in them. The New Testament speaks mystically of the Spirit living in us. Paul writes: “You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.” (Romans 8:9-11)

Another perspective of a believer’s relationship to Christ is that Christians are the ones who are “in Christ.” Paul addressed the believers in Colosse as “the holy and faithful brothers in Christ.” (Colossians 1:2) He also addressed the Philippian Christians as “saints in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 1:1) The language of Christ living in a believer and a believer being in Christ speaks of the intimate relationship we are to have with Jesus Christ. Jesus is alive today, and wants to be with us and in us. We need to acknowledge His Spirit and His presence until He physically and bodily returns one day!

Questions To Ponder

1. What about Jesus caught your attention today?
2. What aspect(s) of Jesus death do you find bears repeating?
3. Why is the resurrection of Jesus Christ relevant to you today?
4. What amazed you about the claims of Jesus?
5. Is the presence of Jesus a reality in your life?

Discover Love

A survey was once given, asking the question, “If there is one thing in life you can have, what would it be?” The overwhelming answer from respondents was “love.” To most people, the desire to love and be loved is deeper than any other. Many people live in a world that is void of love. They have experienced loveless relationships. Some grew up in broken homes where self-preservation was the key to survival, while others grew up in homes that seemed outwardly like a normal family, but were actually full of discouragement and bitterness. Some have seen their romances turn into disappointment, while still others have tried to exist in a cold, competitive world that treats them as a number and statistic. It is therefore not surprising to find that many people in our world are lonely, desperately wanting to love and be loved.

We all need love. From the time we were born into this world, we needed to be held, touched, and loved by our parents. Most parents do love their children, but often they do not know how to express their love in a manner that lets the child feel loved. As a result, many people grow up yearning for the love they lacked as children.

Some people look for love by being involved in various relationships, going from one person to another, while others search for true love and intimacy by engaging in all kinds of sexual activity. Some people have tried to make as much money as possible so that they can buy their own love and happiness, while others turn to accomplishments in this game of life to find acceptance. Yet these attempts for love often leave deeper wounds, a feeling of empty purposelessness, and a profound sense of loneliness. The hurt and the loneliness can sometimes be so intense that people indulge in a particular hobby or habit to erase the pain of not knowing true love.

Is love the end of the rainbow we never find? Is it an ideal dream that belongs only to the world of fables and fairy tales? The Apostle John makes an interesting statement about love in one of his letters. He writes, “Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.” (I John 4:8) Later on in the letter, John writes, “And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.” (I John 4:16)

God does more than know love and express love; He *is* love. God is love in His nature and His character. At the very essence of God is love. At the very essence of love is God. To understand and experience God is to love. To understand and experience love is to know God. When people try to love without God, they love in a vacuum. God has created and designed us to love when we are connected to Him. It is only when we have His Spirit in us, then we can truly love our neighbours. It is only through His Spirit that He can help us to truly love our enemies.

How can we truly love? If God is love, how can He erase the pain, the bitterness, and the loneliness that has been built up over the years? How can we connect with God to the point that we can truly love our neighbours and our enemies?

I. Loving God

The first love relationship we all need is with God. Our love relationship with God is the Father of all relationships. When people are connected with God, they are also connected with an endless source of love for other relationships. A

love relationship with God begins by understanding, receiving, and responding to His love for us.

The Old Testament contains many words that express the idea of love. *'ahab* is mostly used to express human love towards God, people, family, friends, and things. It was used in the context of human love between a man and a woman, such as in the case of Jacob being “in love” with Rachel (Genesis 29:18). *'ahab* was also used to describe the human love between family member, as in the case of Israel, who “loved Joseph more than any of his other sons” (Genesis 37:3). It can also be used as human love for an object or a belief such as in the command, “hate evil, love good” (Amos 5:14). *'ahab* has also been used to express our human love towards God. “Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6:5).

Two words in the Old Testament are often used to express God’s love towards man. The Hebrew word *racham* means to love, love deeply, have mercy, be compassionate, have tender affection, or have compassion. “Then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you...” (Deuteronomy 30:3). Another Hebrew word that expresses God’s love is *Checed*, meaning goodness, kindness, and faithfulness. “For great is His love towards us” (Psalm 117:2). God’s love expressed in the Old Testament is often in the context of mercy, compassion, goodness, loving kindness, and faithfulness.

Ancient Greek literature has three words that convey the idea of love. One Greek word, *eros*—from which we get the word ‘erotic’—refers to romantic or sexual love, and is not found in the New Testament. Another Greek word, *phileo*, means to love, approve of, like, sanction, treat affectionately or kindly, welcome, befriend, show signs of love to, or kiss. It is often used in the context of brotherly love, as in Titus’ letter: “Greet those who love us in the faith” (Titus 3:15). Philadelphia is known as ‘the city of brotherly love’ for this reason.

A third Greek word which means ‘love,’ appears rarely in ancient Greek literature but quite often in the New Testament is the word *agape*. *Agape* love can also mean brotherly love, affection, good will, love, or benevolence. What distinguishes *agape* love from *phileo* love is that *agape* is almost always associated with God’s love, which is described as perfect. “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love” (I John 4:18). *Agape* love is seen as a sacrificial love. “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). God’s love is also an unconditional love. He loves us in spite of our rebellion against Him: “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

The Bible clearly shows that God’s love is the highest form of love anyone can experience. It involves mercy, compassion, goodness, kindness, and faithfulness, expressed in fearless, unconditional, and sacrificial perfection. It is never selfish, but always selfless. God’s love is patient and kind: “It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres” (I Corinthians 13:4-7).

Our minds must begin to grasp the magnitude of God's merciful love. However, a relationship with the Creator is more than a mere intellectual exercise. A relationship with God must penetrate deep to the core of one's soul and one's spirit, leaving us emotionally drained in the end—yet spiritually satisfying. Consider the Psalmist, who had a taste of a connection with God and yet thirsted for more: "As the deer pants for streams of waters, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?" (Psalm 42:1-2)

It is when we begin to grasp, understand, and experience God's merciful love that we can then respond to God in love. God's love encompasses us and overwhelms us so much that we must respond in gratitude and worship: "Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you" (Psalm 63:3).

The summary of the law in the Old Testament was to choose to love God: "This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him" (Deuteronomy 30:19:20a). Our love for God means that we hate what is evil: "Let those who love the LORD hate evil, for he guards the lives of his faithful ones and delivers them from the hand of the wicked" (Psalm 97:10).

An expert in the law once tested Jesus by asking Him, "Which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied, "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment" (Matthew 22:37-38). Our capacity to truly love unconditionally, sacrificially, and perfectly must begin with God's love melting our hearts. It is when we are in love with God, being saturated with Him, that we have the power to truly love others.

II. Loving Our Neighbours

Many people do not have a problem with loving God. After all, God is love. However, when it comes to loving others, many do have a problem. For some, loving their neighbour really depends on who their neighbour is.

Another young lawyer wanted to sharpen his intellect with Jesus. He came to Jesus and asked Him, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

"What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

He answered: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind,' and, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'"

"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" (Luke 10:25-29)

The young lawyer wanted to test Jesus. He knew that the central theme of the law was to love God and to love one's neighbour. Jesus agreed with the lawyer's response and told him that if he did this, he would have that eternal life. The lawyer believed that he could produce evidence in his life to prove his love

for God. However, he knew that he could not produce evidence to show that he loved his neighbours. It was as if he had just created his own exam, and then miserably flunked it. Here was a clear requirement from God that was not obeyed. He felt convicted and wanted to justify himself and asked, “Who is my neighbour?”

Jesus did not respond with abstract theories on love. Instead, He told a story of a man who was mugged and left for dead. He spoke of a world where people can get robbed, beaten, and even murdered. He replied to the lawyer with the following story:

“A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have’” (Luke 10:30-35).

A. The Identity of Neighbours

Who is your neighbour? The identity of a neighbour depends on who and where you are. If you are visiting a friend who lives in a small unfamiliar village where you have never been before, everyone will be a stranger. However, everyone in that village would consider your friend a neighbour. Who your neighbour is depends, then, on who and where you are. If you were the wounded traveler, your definition of neighbour would be anyone who is willing to help. I was once fishing with a friend when the motor on our boat died right in the middle of the lake. Our definition of neighbour then was anyone who was able to come by and help.

The top candidate for someone to come by and help was the priest. After all, he was in the practice of helping out people. A priest would quote Scripture every morning: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). He knew and practiced the parts about loving God. He probably justified walking by the wounded traveller because of his responsibilities. The priest was probably thinking that the man looked dead or almost dead. If he were to get involved, the man might even die in his arms. Then he would have touched a dead body, making him ceremonially unclean and therefore unable to perform the rites of the temple. After all, He was obeying the

Lord by avoiding the dead body, for priests “must not enter a place where there is a dead body. He must not make himself unclean, even for his father or mother, nor leave the sanctuary of his God or desecrate it, because he has been dedicated by the anointing oil of his God” (Leviticus 21:11-12). Helping the wounded traveller would have caused a great deal of inconvenience and raised too many questions about why he made himself unclean.

A second top candidate for helping the neighbour was the Levite. He too was most likely on his way to a meeting at the temple in Jerusalem. Perhaps he thought that the robbers were still around and cautiously passed by on the other side of the road. More likely the Levite did not have the time to get involved with this wounded traveller. He probably had people to see and things to do. The wounded traveller would have delayed him and altered his plans that day. In a different time and under different circumstance, the Levite might have helped.

The Samaritan, in contrast, was probably at the bottom of the list of possible candidates for helping his neighbour. Samaritans were half-Jews and seen as “dogs.” Yet when he saw a stranger in need, he helped him. To the wounded traveler, a neighbour was anyone who would come by and help. To the Samaritan, a neighbour was anyone he came across in need of his help.

Who is your neighbour? Your neighbour is anyone you come across and able to help. He can be a total stranger. Your neighbour could be someone you think is unfriendly, unlovely, unattractive, or unrewarding to be involved with.

B. The Involvement with Neighbours

What does it take to love your neighbour? First, it requires involvement with your neighbour in the giving of your time. The road to Jerusalem was known to have robbers, and the Samaritan would have had good reason to suspect that they were lurking around. Nonetheless, he went out of his way to spend time with this stranger. Loving anyone requires spending time with that person. Loving a neighbour requires our time, even at the cost of our own inconvenience.

Second, loving your neighbour requires your involvement in the giving of your resources. The Samaritan was willing to give two silver coins, which was two denarii—equivalent to two day’s wages. There are times when loving our neighbours means parting with our money or resources. Loving our neighbour, then, means being involved with them, both in terms of our time and resources.

C. The Instruction about Neighbours

Why then is it so hard for many of us to love our neighbours? It certainly is more than seeing the needs of the homeless, the poor, the troubled and unlovable around us. It is not enough to simply see the need of those around us. The priest saw the need of the wounded traveler, but he also saw the potential uncleanness of the situation. The Levite saw the need of the wounded traveler, but he also saw the inconvenience of getting involved. If others were to travel on the same road that day, everyone would have seen the same need of the wounded traveler. The difference that determined how the different men acted lay in who they were. The priest and the Levite were very religious indeed, but they did not have the love of God in them. The Samaritan had the love of God in him and was able to act lovingly.

The emphasis here is not on the object of love but on the one who loves. What you are determines how you love and how you act. A person who is not connected with God and does not know His love will have a difficult time loving his neighbour. In contrast, a person who knows God and is saturated with God's love will be able to love his neighbour unconditionally. What you are inside determines what you see and do.

We are created to be creatures of love, first, to love God and second, to love our neighbours. It is very difficult to love our neighbours unconditionally without first loving God. Love is the main characteristic of a Christian. You can tell whether or not a person is a Christian by the love he or she demonstrates. A person is not necessarily a Christian just because he claims to be one. A person is not necessarily a Christian just because he attends church, does good works, and obeys the commandments. A person is not necessarily a Christian just because he belongs to a religious group, like the priest or Levite did, or just because he holds on to a set of religious beliefs. Only love marks the Christian. Jesus said, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34-35). The real sign of a Christian is God-given *agape* love—love that is unselfish, unconditional, sacrificial, and perfect in its expression, even to strangers.

III. Loving Our Enemies

How far does God's love take us? Jesus gave us a new perspective on love. He taught:

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be

perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:43-48).

The traditional religious teaching of the time was to “Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.” This was a natural aspect of love, for it is easy in almost every culture to justifying loving one’s neighbour and hating one’s enemy. However, what Jesus taught was not natural. The idea of loving one’s enemies and praying for those who persecute you goes against every grain of our human nature. Loving those who love you and greeting only your brothers are examples of natural love. Loving one’s enemies takes supernatural love. Only with God’s supernatural love can we even begin to love our enemies.

The idea of loving one’s enemies has several implications to our loving our neighbours. First, it means that the identity of neighbour extends even to our enemies. Consider God’s love for us: “when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son...”(Romans 5:10). If this is the case, that we are to love those who hate, despise, and persecute us, then loving our neighbour means loving everyone we come across and in need of our help.

Secondly, loving our enemies means that our love for one another must be unconditional. The emphasis is no longer on the one who is loved but the lover. Real love towards another is never *if* or *because* that individual meets up with certain conditions. God’s love is never, “I love him if...,” or “I love him because...,” but “I love him.” No conditions should ever be attached to our love for our neighbours.

Thirdly, loving our enemies means that our love must be a supernatural love. Our human ability to love others is limited. True *agape* unconditional, sacrificial, and selfless love requires the Spirit of love. When Jesus tells us to be perfect like the Heavenly Father is perfect, we acknowledge that we cannot display this perfect love without some kind of supernatural intervention. Once again, we cannot experience true love without our Creator. “God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him” (I John 4:16).

God loves you and created you to be loved and to love. Have you ever considered true love in relation with the source of love? God wants to saturate you with His love and give you the love that so overflows to the point where you love even your enemies. True love is not godless, but God-centred. At the heart of Christianity is the true experience of God’s love.

Questions to Ponder

1. What did you learn about love?
2. How far can a person love without God?
3. What is the difference between God’s love and human love?
4. Who is your neighbor?
5. Do you have difficulty loving your neighbor? Why?

Discover Forgiveness

The head of a mental institution once said, "I could release half my patients if they knew how to get rid of guilt." People not only feel guilty about their sins; they are guilty of their sins. We all respond to guilt in different ways. Some people deny their guilt. They refuse to respect the law and the lawgivers who reveal their guilt. People who deny that they are guilty of certain sins will try to excuse their sin, because the law did not fit into their circumstance. Some people reject God and the Bible because God's Word shows them that they are guilty of sin, and they do not want to be reminded of it. The Bible speaks of those who suppress the truth, wanting to continue to indulge in their sins. "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them." (Romans 1:18-19)

A similar response to guilt is to hide the guilt. Some rather ignore the guilt and hopes it goes away or hide it so that not too many people will notice. King David was guilty of adultery with Bathsheba. When Bathsheba told David that she was pregnant by him, David tried to cover up their sin by sending Uriah, Bathsheba's husband, back home in hope that Uriah would sleep with his wife. When the attempted cover-up failed, David ordered Uriah to the front lines of the battle, where he was eventually killed (II Samuel 11). Guilt never goes away when we try to ignore it or hide it from others.

Another response to guilt is to shift the blame to some one else. When Adam was confronted by the Lord concerning his disobedience in eating from the tree he was commanded not to eat from, he refused to take responsibility for his own sin. Adam said: "The woman you put here with me -- she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." (Genesis 3:12) Adam tried to shift the focus on the woman and even to God Himself. He said that it was "you" (God) who put her here with me. People who blame others for their own guilt have a difficult time taking responsibility for their own sins.

The story was told of a young twelve-year-old boy who was throwing stones and accidentally killed one of the family geese by hitting it squarely on the head. The young boy buried the dead bird, hoping that his parents would not notice that one of the twenty-four birds was missing. However, that evening, his sister called him aside and said, "I saw what you did. If you don't offer to do the dishes tonight, I'll tell Mother." The next morning, the boy's sister blackmailed him into washing the dishes again. His guilt was a chain that bound him to do the dishes.

Many people today are confined because of their guilt. Some have spent much time and money trying to get rid of it from their lives, and yet it keeps coming back. Others feel so guilty of what they have done that they are determined to live a torturous life in order to punish themselves for their sins. What is God's answer to guilt?

I. The Forgiving Father

Christianity is all about getting rid of guilt and sin. The solution to guilt is to be forgiven. Jesus had much to say about forgiveness. He taught and told many stories related to forgiveness. The most beautiful story was about a lost son in Luke 15:11-32. Jesus said:

There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' So he got up and went to his father.

But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'

The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'

'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'

A. The rebellious son (11-20)

Jesus introduced to us a rebellious son who wanted to manipulate his father. He wanted his share of the inheritance now, instead of waiting to receive it when his father died. In asking for his inheritance, the young son was really telling his father to drop dead. This son did not care much for his father's feelings. He cared only for himself and wanted to be on his own.

The young man's inheritance was land. According to Jewish custom and law, his older brother would get two-thirds of the land and he

would get one-third of the land. It was a bold move for the son to go against the patriarchal social custom by asking for the land. And the father, instead of disciplining him, actually gives him the land. Even God the Father recognizes that in parenthood, there is a time to let go!

The young man got together all he had. That most likely means that he sold his land for money. He wanted to move away from his father and set off to a distant country (a Jewish term for Gentile-populated areas). The young man wanted to be away from his living. Rather than invest his inheritance, he spent it in with wild parties and lifestyles. He spent everything he had and was unprepared for a famine.

The young rebel struggled to feed himself. He ran out of money and had to work at the only job he could find, feeding pigs (keep in mind he grew up seeing pigs as filthy, disgusting animals). He noticed that the pigs he was feeding ate better than he did. He longed to eat what the pigs ate, yet no one gave him anything to eat.

He decided to make up with his father. The story says that he “came to his senses.” (17) The young son remembered his father and His father’s servants. He acknowledged his sorry condition and decided to go back to his father. He was planning to confess his sins to his father. He had a speech all pre-planned, saying: “Father I have sinned against heaven and against you.” (18) This was more than just saying “I’m sorry.” The young son concluded that he could only come back as a servant. He planned to acknowledge that he was no longer worthy to be called his father’s son. The young man concluded that he could only come back as a hired house servant or skilled laborer, and not as a son. He may be able to earn back what he has lost, and possibly earn back his father’s favour. Instead of just thinking about it, the young son got up and went to his father.

B. The repentant son (20-24)

The repentant son experienced the Father’s compassion. His father was waiting in his fenced-in community when he saw his son. He must have recognized his son’s walk. When the father saw him, he was already waiting for him. The father was full of compassion for his son. He ran and threw his arms around him and kissed him. It was socially immoral for a man to expose his legs in public in Jesus’ day. Yet the father must have lifted up his robes and exposed his legs when he ran to his son. The father did not care about what other people thought when he showed his love towards his son. Perhaps he wanted to get to his son before the town’s people approached him and humiliated him for losing his money to Gentiles. The town’s people could have forced the son to be an outcast in the village. But the father loved the rebellious son so much that he would even go through humiliation for his return. This is a picture of how much God the Father loves us and is waiting for us in rebellion to come home.

The repentant son experienced the Father's forgiveness. The father acknowledged his runaway child as a son. The father called the young repentant rebel this "son of mine" along with all the hugs and kisses. He did not despise or disown his son for what he did, but related to him as a son. When we experience the forgiveness of God, we are treated as sons and daughters of God, and not as hired help.

The repentant son experienced the Father's grace. Grace is receiving what we do not deserve. The best robe was put on the son. Usually the robe was given to the guest of honour. The sandals on his feet would be sandals only a free man would wear. The ring on his finger is the signet ring of authority. The father gave all the privileges and rights to the son. The fattened calf was killed only on very special occasions. People in the first century did not eat meat regularly. But this time, they all had a feast. It was an unexpected party with many reasons to rejoice. They began to celebrate because of a son who was dead, but now was alive. He was lost but now was found. When a sinner comes home to the Father, He does not humiliate him by putting him in the position of a hired hand, but rejoices and gives him the full status and privileges of a son.

C. The raging son (25-32)

It is interesting that Jesus did not end the story of the lost son with the celebration. The rebellious son had an older brother who would have been considered "the good son" by many standards. Even though outwardly the older son seemed to have a better relationship with his father, the facts show otherwise. The older son was the self-righteous raging son.

The raging son was angry with his Father. He was jealous of his younger brother. The older son refused to go into the party. He never even had a party thrown for him. He never even had a goat, never mind the fatten calf. He was judgemental toward his brother. He referred to his brother as "this son of yours" and not "my brother." He said that his brother squandered his father's property with prostitutes. This may be only what he may have heard, or made up without concrete facts. The older brother was angry with his Father for welcoming his younger brother home.

The raging son was arguing with his father. He talked about the righteous life he had led. He said: "I've been slaving for you all these years...I've never disobeyed your orders." He talked about the rewards he lacked. He pointed out to his father that he was never even given a goat so that he could celebrate with his friends. What the older son was saying was that he really deserved the fattened calf. He talked about the resources he would lose. The older son pointed out to the father that his younger son squandered his property, but now he wanted to move in on his older brother's inheritance. What the older son was saying was that the

father's young son was freeloading. The father killed the fattened calf for the younger son, while the older son probably had plans for that calf.

The raging son was alienated from his father. He failed to see his father's presence. The father reassured him of his presence saying, "My son, you are always with me." The older son also failed to see his father's possessions. The father reaffirmed to the older son that he was still the heir by saying: "Everything I have is yours." He failed to see his father's passion. The father pointed out that this brother of yours, not just my son, was dead to us and is alive again. He was lost to us and is found again.

The two sons related to the father differently. The rebellious son became the repentant son. He had hurt his father greatly but changed his mind concerning his rebellion. The repentant son truly experienced the father's love, forgiveness, and grace. This puts him in a right relationship with God. The raging son, on the other hand, did not experience the forgiveness of God. He was self-righteous and outwardly seemed to have a healthy relationship with the father. However, the older son was not close to the father at all. He did not have the father's heart for those who were dead and lost.

This story that Jesus told was told in the context of the despised tax collectors and sinners who gathered around Jesus to hear His teachings. The religious leaders of the day severely criticized Jesus saying: "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." (Luke 15:2) The religious leaders missed the point: it was the "sinners" who need the forgiveness of God. Sinners who experience the forgiveness of God are much closer to the Father than those who are religious outward, but inwardly do not know the Father's heart.

II. The Forgiving Child

The Father's forgiveness is only one aspect of forgiveness. The other aspect of forgiveness deals with our forgiveness in response to the Father's forgiveness. We have not truly understood the implications of God's forgiveness if we do not forgive. Consider what Jesus said: "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive you." (Matthew 6:14-15) Jesus taught us to pray, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." (Matthew 6:12) Once again, Jesus taught us that our sins have put us into a great moral and legal debt. The Father has forgiven us and atoned for our sins through the death of His Son. Since he has paid our debts, it is only fitting that we cancel the moral debts we feel are owed to us. The following passage in Matthew 18:21-35 has much to say about forgiveness:

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?"

Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."

"Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

"The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

"But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded.

"His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.'

"But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.

"Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."

A. The PROBLEM with forgiveness (21-22)

Peter asked Jesus, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me?" Many can identify with Peter because it is hard to forgive someone again and again. Peter thought that he was being very generous in saying up to seven times. However, Jesus pointed out that we should forgive seventy-seven times. He was not suggesting that after four hundred and ninety times we can stop forgiving, but that forgiveness should be unlimited.

There are many people who in their minds accept the forgiveness of God, but have difficulty forgiving themselves or others. There are some people who say they accept the forgiveness of God, but they do not forgive themselves. They believe that their sin is so severe that they need to be punished. The problem is that they have not truly experienced the forgiveness of God that removes their guilt. By punishing themselves for their own sins, they are really saying that Christ's punishment on the cross was not good enough for them.

There are others who say they accept the forgiveness of God, but they cannot forgive those who offended them. This is a real misunderstanding of how much grace we have received from God. It is easier for prodigal children, who have received much grace from God, to forgive others than for self-righteous religionists, who do not forgive their brothers.

B. The PARABLE on forgiveness (23-34)

Jesus talked about the kingdom being like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. A certain man owed the king 10,000 talents and was unable to pay it. The king ordered that the man and his wife and children be sold to repay the debt. The man pleaded and begged for mercy and the king canceled the man's debt. When the servant went out, he found a fellow servant that owed him an amount significantly less than that which he had owed the king. The man who had been forgiven by the king of the great debt could not find it in himself to forgive the smaller debts owed to him. Instead, he had the man thrown in jail until he could pay the small debt. This not only disturbed the other servants, but it bothered the king, who eventually heard about it. The king called the servant "wicked" and threw him into jail until he could pay back all that he owed.

C. The POINT on forgiveness (35)

The king in the parable is God, who has forgiven us of the great debt of our sin. How can we not forgive our offenders, whose sin against us is comparatively so small? How can we expect God to forgive us when we cannot forgive others? How can a person claim to have the forgiveness of God and remain bitter against a parent, leader, boss, peer, brother, or sister? Those who truly have God's forgiveness should not hesitate to forgive themselves and others.

D. The PRACTICE of forgiveness

First, realize your need for the Father's forgiveness. Humble yourself as the repentant son and realize that you are at His mercy because of your sins. Everyone who receives the forgiveness of God must realize that they are deep in the debt of sin and at the mercy of God.

Second, accept the Father's forgiveness. Accept in your heart that God has paid for your debt of sin through the death of His Son, Jesus. Accept the fact that Jesus died for your sins and took your place on the cross.

Third, forgive yourself for your sins. Understand that Jesus was the substitute for your sins and nothing else. That means His death was

enough to satisfy the wrath of God. If God has forgiven you, who are you not to forgive yourself?

Fourth, forgive others who have offended you. Realize that God is using your offender to develop your character. Thank God for those lessons in offense. Yield all your rights to God, especially your right to your opinions without being “jumped on,” or your right to be accepted as an individual.

Often we feel we have rights to our own personal free time, to privacy, to earn and spend money, to choose our friends, to our personal belongings, and to be in control.

It is hard to forgive others. That’s why when we become children of God, God gives us His Spirit. His Spirit indwells us and helps us to forgive. One of the fruits of the Spirit is love (Galatians 5:22). The act of forgiveness is an act of love. Jesus said: “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.” (Matthew 5:7) Realize that “judgement without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgement!” (James 2:13)

III. The Solution to Guilt

God’s solution to remove guilt is His forgiveness. A person who has truly experienced the forgiveness of God is able to also forgive others. True freedom from all guilt is found in the forgiveness the Father gives through Jesus Christ.

The story of the boy who accidentally killed and buried the goose found freedom. As long as he wanted to keep his guilt hidden, his sister would keep blackmailing him into washing the dishes. On the third day of the blackmail, the young boy surprised his sister by telling her it was her turn to wash the dishes. When she tried to remind him of what she could do in revealing his secret, he replied, “I’ve already told Mother, and she has forgiven me. Now you do the dishes. I’m free again!”

Our guilt in respect to the law of sin condemns us to death. However, “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.” (Romans 8:1-2) When we have God’s forgiveness, no one can condemn us with our guilt. We are free from guilt! We are free from sin! We are free from death!

Questions To Ponder

1. How have you been dealing with your guilt?
2. What aspect(s) on forgiveness hit you today?
3. Who can you identify with better, the older son or the younger son?
4. Are you finding it hard to practice forgiveness? Why?
5. What must you do today with your guilt?

Discover the Good News!

Jesus started His ministry preaching the gospel, the good news! What is the Good News of the Bible? This is the same gospel that the Apostles preached everywhere they went. It is the same good news that has changed millions of lives around the world. It is this good news that is light in darkness, hope to those in despair, life to the lifeless. The Apostle Paul pointed out to the Corinthians: “Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preach to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.” (I Corinthians 15:1-2)

A rich young ruler once asked Jesus an interesting question: “*What must I do to get eternal life?*” (Matthew 19:16) The young man had many things going in his favour. He had great wealth. Not only was he wealthy, he was very wealthy (Matthew 19:22). He was described as a “young man,” (Matthew 19:20) which meant that he had youth and health. The young man also had position. He was described as a “ruler,” (Luke 18:18) probably a ruler in local synagogue -- a very honoured position for a young man. The young man also had influence. He was a respected religious leader who was devout, honest, wealthy, prominent, and influential. He was the kind of young man many parents would want their daughters to bring home. This young man also had initiative. He was the one who came to Jesus and started the conversation.

However, the rich young ruler sincerely felt that something was missing in his life. He asked: “What good thing must I DO to get eternal life?” He still felt he did not have eternal life. There was emptiness in spite of all his possessions, emptiness in spite of all his position, and emptiness in spite of all his power. In the eyes of the world he had everything to live for, but in his own eyes his life was empty.

Many people today have asked this common question: “*How can we have eternal life?*” It is common for people of different backgrounds, ages, and walks of life to desire eternal life. Men and women have been seeking salvation, heaven, and the kingdom of God since the dawn of creation. Central to the teachings of Jesus is the truth about eternal life in the kingdom of heaven. How can we have life everlasting? The Bible tells us what we must do to get eternal life. Consider the following:

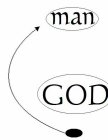
I. Realize Your Condition

Many people desire **eternal life** and have tried to do many things to obtain it. However, the Bible clearly shows that we can never obtain eternal life on our own: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9)

God is a holy God and we have all failed to live up to His standard of perfection. Scripture tells us that we “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23) The Bible tells us that “the wages of sin is death.” (Romans 6:23) Sin separates us from God, and deprives us of eternal life in heaven. God first created man to be under His care.



Our sinfulness moved us from being in a place that was under God into a position over God.



Do you now realize why no one is in a position to earn his or her way to heaven? It is our sin that cause us to miss the mark of holiness. Sin is an addiction that affects our relationship with God. How then, can we deal with our sins and get into a right relationship with God?

II. Repent Of Your Sins

The only way to deal with our sins is to repent of our sins. To repent means to *change our minds* and our hearts from living for ourselves to living for God. It means that we have come to a realization that we cannot save ourselves and that we are spiritually bankrupt before the Almighty God. In other words, one must admit to God that one's spiritual life is in total disorder and in need of His help.

The rich young ruler did not think that he needed to repent of his sins. The young man did not see his own need for a Saviour. He thought that he could earn his salvation and asked: "What *good thing* must I *do* to get eternal life?" The young man was longing to know what good works could bring him the life he was asking for. He saw Jesus as a gifted teacher, but not the one who is good. He was the self-assured guy who thought he could handle whatever instructions Jesus would give him. The young man failed to see his own sinfulness.

Jesus told the young man: "If you want to enter life, obey the commandments." (Matthew 19:17) In other words, Jesus was telling the young man that he knows what to do, because it is in the Scriptures. He was a learned and devout Jew who knew what God's law required, so Jesus told him to obey it. The young man responded by asking, "Which ones?" He had read the commandments many times and as a Jew, memorized them as a boy. He had carefully kept them since. He was asking Jesus which of the commandments He had in mind.

Then Jesus quoted five of the Ten Commandments, and "love your neighbor as yourself." No Scripture was more familiar to the young man in his religious upbringing than the ones quoted to him by Jesus. Jesus was trying to

show that he could not keep all the commandments perfectly; he could not even keep the ones quoted to him.

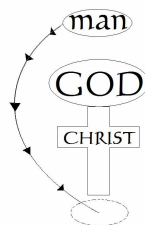
The rich young ruler responded: “All these I have kept...what do I still lack?” (Matthew 19:20) The young man missed the point. He failed to see that the commandments he had learned himself, he had failed to obey. Jesus was trying to point out that if one wants eternal life, one must obey the commandments perfectly. But since the young man lacked this perfect life, he could not have obeyed these commandments perfectly.

There are many religious people who are like the rich young ruler. They fail to see their own sinfulness and their need for a Saviour. They feel that they have it all together spiritually. They would be the ones saying, “What do I still lack?”

Jesus tells us who enters the kingdom of heaven. He said: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:3) The kingdom belongs to those who are spiritually bankrupt and totally humbled before God. It is not for those who are rich in spirit, thinking that they have it all together spiritually.

When we repent, we change the direction of our lives from a life of sin to a life for God. “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord” (Acts 3:19).

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” (Matthew 4:17) Repentance is not just about feeling sorry for sin. It is more than a few words of confession to ease our conscience. Each one of us needs to repent of trying to be God, and to put oneself willingly under God through Jesus Christ.



Ask yourself if you have ever repented of your sins. **Have you ever come before God, humbled, in need of His mercy, and desiring of His forgiveness?**

III. Believe In Jesus Christ

When we repent of our sins, we realize that we cannot save ourselves. We must realize that we are in need of a Saviour. That is why Jesus Christ came and died for our sins and took the punishment for sins that we deserved on the cross. We must believe, from our hearts (not just our minds), that Jesus died for our sins and that He rose again three days later to show His power over death. At the heart of the gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The good news is all about Jesus Christ and how He provides for us a way to enter the kingdom.

“But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8) The Apostle Paul summed up the gospel when he writes: “For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.” (I Corinthians 15:3-4)

When a person believes in Jesus Christ, it means that a person puts his or her total trust in Jesus to save him or her from the penalty of his or her sins. It means that the person realizes that his or her eternity is in the hands of Jesus Christ. The person who truly trusts in Jesus to be their Saviour from eternal condemnation will be saved.

“If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.” (Romans 10:9-10)

The question is, have you ever trusted in Christ from your heart for your eternity? And what does trusting in Christ for your eternity mean?

IV. Follow Jesus Christ

When we want to trust in Christ for our salvation, it also means that we are willing to follow Him for all eternity. Not only do we want to accept Him to be our Savior, but we also acknowledge Him to be our Lord. Accepting Christ means that we accept also who He is and that He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. He is the master, and we are disciples, willing to follow His will for the rest of our lives.

“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” (Matthew 4:19) Jesus said, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross (die to your own self and to your selfish desires) daily and follow me.” (Luke 9:23)

Jesus told the rich young ruler: “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasures in heaven. Then come, follow me.” (Matthew 19:21) In other words, if you want to be complete, with eternal life, then go, sell your possessions and give it to the poor. Then, come follow me.

This is the only person in Scripture that Jesus told to sell his possessions. Jesus was testing the man to make him face his own spiritual condition. The young man was self-satisfied with the law. He wanted eternal life on his own terms. He did not think he had any sins to confess. He did not think he was spiritually poor. He thought that he was willing to do whatever the Lord would require. Jesus told him to prove his sincerity in being willing to do whatever by selling his possessions and giving to the poor.

The real issue with the rich young ruler according to Jesus was: Who is in control of your life -- you or me? The complete life is the life where Jesus is in control, where Jesus is master, where Jesus is Lord. That’s why He tells many to follow Him.

To follow Jesus is to obey Jesus. To obey Jesus is to obey His word and His will. Obeying Jesus means that you are willing to put Jesus first in your life and to let Him be in control. It is also an expression of love and gratitude for all that Jesus has done for you on the cross. Jesus said: "If you love me, you will obey what I command." (John 14:15)

There is a definite difference between those who just profess faith in Christ and never follow Him, in contrast to those who acknowledge Him as Saviour and Lord, and are following Him in obedience.

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 7:21)

Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." (John 10:10) Do you have this abundant and full life today?

Summary

The gospel must appeal to your mind, emotions, and will. First, you must intellectually find the gospel acceptable. Second, you must be emotionally in want of God's love and forgiveness. Third, you must be willing to become a follower of Jesus. In summary, in order for you to have an abundant and eternal life, you must:

1. Realize you are in no condition to save yourself because of your sins.
2. Repent of your sins and humble yourself before the Almighty God.
3. Believe in your heart that Jesus died for sinners (including you) and rose again to show His power over death.
4. Be willing to follow and obey Him for the rest of your life.

What will keep you from totally following Jesus today? Are you willing to become a Christian now and be a disciple of Jesus Christ?

Are you willing to:

1. **Repent of your sins?**
2. **Believe in Jesus Christ?**
3. **Follow Jesus Christ?**

If your answer is **YES** to all three questions, then you can receive Christ right now by praying to God. It is not the words you pray as much as your heart desires that God hear. The following is a sample prayer that a person can pray to ask Christ to come into one's life.

Dear God,

Thank you for your love! I realize that I have sinned against You. Please forgive me of my sins and have mercy on my soul. I want to repent of my sins and to start anew. I believe that You gave Your Son to die on the cross for my sins. I now realize that His resurrection power is the same power that gives eternal life. I want to follow You from this day forth. Come into my life and be my Master. Help me to be the person you want me to be! In Jesus' name, Amen.

God's Assurance

If you have prayed this prayer from your heart, consider the following Scriptures:

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." (Romans 10:13)
Only those who have truly called on the name of the Lord will be saved.

"The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." (Romans 8:16) God gives us His Spirit that dwells in us when we become His children. Is the Spirit of God in you?

"He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life." (I John 5:12-13) Study the Word of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

To the New Believer

If you have made a commitment to Jesus Christ today, congratulations! You are today entering a new phase in your spiritual journey. Mark it down in your book today. Have a witness with you to share in your joy! To be a Christian is to be willing to follow Jesus for the rest of your life with the help of the Holy Spirit.

My Commitment

From this day forth I realize that I cannot save myself. I know that I have sinned against the Almighty God and I repent of my sins. I have made a commitment today to receive Jesus Christ as my personal Saviour and to follow Him as my Lord.

Your Signature

Witness

Date

Now that you have received Christ, this is the beginning of a beautiful relationship with Jesus Christ. In order for you to grow in your relationship with Him, you must:

1. Begin to ***read your Bible daily*** so that you can know Him better. “Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.” (I Peter 2:2)
2. ***Talk to Him in prayer*** often about all matters of life. “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:6-7)

3. ***Share with someone*** about your new relationship with Christ. “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8)
4. Seek to ***worship the Lord*** with your life. “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God -- this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will -- His good, pleasing and perfect will.” (Romans 12:1-2)
5. ***Fellowship and grow*** with other believers in a Bible-believing church. “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another -- and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:25)
6. ***Love and serve*** God with all your heart. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” (Deuteronomy 6:5)

Conclusion

Our recent journey together has taken us to discover more about God, His Word, the Bible, Jesus, forgiveness, and the Good News. We have seen how in beginning with God we desire His glory. The glory of the Lord implies the presence of God among His people. The glory of the Lord was in the tabernacle and the in the temple in the Old Testament. The glory of the Lord was there when Jesus was born. Throughout history, there have been those who desire the glory of God. The reason many do not see the glory of God is because “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23) Where is the glory of God today? Is the glory in a temple or a church? Remember that the glory of God indicates the presence of God among His people. Jesus said, “...I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20) God has told His people, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” (Hebrews 13:5) If God is with us, then His glory is among us.

Remember that when we become children of God, Christ comes into us and lives in us. Jesus’ presence in us is where His glory dwells. The Apostle Paul writes about a mystery that has been hidden in the dark but now light is shed upon it. He writes:

“Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness -- the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” (Colossians 1:24-27)

May the Lord bless you with the hope of glory in your spiritual journey!

Questions To Ponder

1. What did you learn about the Good News today?
2. Where are you in your spiritual journey?
3. Are there issues that need to be addressed in your life before you can make a total commitment to Jesus?
4. How can you know that you have eternal life?
5. Is there evidence in your life that Christ is in you?

Appendix 4: Interview Questions for Pilot Study Research

Thank you for your time into reading/studying the *7 Discoveries*. I would like to take a few minutes to ask you a few questions about the material. Your answers will be valuable in helping me know how I can improve the *7 Discoveries*.

1. How did you feel about the *7 Discoveries* in general?
2. What did you learn from the *7 Discoveries*?
3. What comments do you have about:
 - a. Discover God
 - b. Discover the Word of God
 - c. Discover the Bible
 - d. Discover Jesus
 - e. Discover love
 - f. Discover forgiveness
 - g. Discover the good news
4. Which chapter did you find more than helpful? Why?
5. Which chapter (s) did you not find helpful? Why?
6. How did the *7 Discoveries* help you in your spiritual journey?
7. How would you improve on the *7 Discoveries*?

Thank you for you time and input!

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Vita

Kai Daniel Mark was born in Hong Kong on February 3, 1958 as the eldest son of Peter Him Mark and Faith Yuet Bing Mark. He immigrated to Canada in May of 1965 with his family at the age of seven and grew up in the City of Toronto. Kai graduated from his high school, Sir Wilfred Laurier Collegiate Institute in 1977 as an Ontario Scholar. He attended Liberty University, which was then Liberty Baptist College, in Lynchburg, Virginia. Kai graduated with a Bachelor of Science in 1981 with a Pastoral major along with a Greek and Theology minor. He then worked as a high school ministry co-ordinator for four and half years with Ambassadors for Christ in Toronto and began to attend Tyndale Theological Seminary, known then as Ontario Theological Seminary. Kai graduated with a Master of Divinity in 1986 and was given the Boswell Preaching Award. He became the English pastor at Mississauga Chinese Baptist Church in 1986 minister, remaining there for seven years. In 1989, Kai was ordained with the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec. In 1993, he became the English pastor of another growing church, Richmond Hill Chinese Community Church. In 2003, Kai planted a church named Unionville Oasis and is currently the lead pastor there.

In 1996, Kai self-published *Contemporary Worship Songs*, a compilation of worship songs he has written over the years. In 1997, Kai produced a CD titled *Hope of Glory: Contemporary Worship Songs* and writes *Essentials to Eternal Life* published by Christian Communication Inc. of Canada. In 2001, Kai also had published *Essentials to Serving God*. Kai graduated from the Arrow Leadership Program in 1999 and has since been working on this dissertation at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Kai plans to graduate in 2008.